

# THE ANGLO-GERMAN CONCERTINA



A SOCIAL HISTORY  
VOLUME 1

DAN M WORRALL

# **The Anglo-German Concertina**

A Social History

Volume 1

Dan M. Worrall

Concertina Press  
Fulshear, Texas

*The Anglo-German Concertina: A Social History, Volume 1*

by Dan M. Worrall

Third Edition, 2010

Originally published in 2009 by Concertina Press, Fulshear, Texas USA; [www.angloconcertina.org](http://www.angloconcertina.org).

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ISBN 978-0-9825996-0-0

LCCN 2009913576

Cover. Celebrating the potato harvest of 1911 in Athea, County Limerick. On the left, May Nan Stevens holds a German concertina. Photograph courtesy of the National Folklore Collection, University College Dublin. Sean O'Dwyer and Mrs. Nora Hurley provided additional information (see Chapter 3).

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Frontispiece, following two pages:

Two late nineteenth century drawings of woodworkers highlight the warmth and affection with which working-class people adopted the German concertina. The illustration on the left is from Germany; its caption, translated from German, reads "When the cat is out of the house, the mouse dances." The illustration on the right is from the journal *The British Workman* of 1874. Three woodworkers are playing *God Save the Queen*. Both images are courtesy of Stephen Chambers.





*This book is dedicated to the memory of my parents,  
John and Eileen Worrall*

## Introduction and Summary

German and Anglo-German concertinas experienced an astonishing period of popularity throughout much of the world from the early 1850s through about 1910. By far the most popular types of concertina, they were played by a wide array of working and middle class people in both rural and urban settings, as well as by various indigenous peoples who lived in areas of European expansion. Their primary use came in playing for new dance fashions that emanated from nineteenth century European ballrooms, including quadrilles, polkas, waltzes, schottisches, galops and the like. The instruments were used for dances in houses, barns and community halls in rural Ireland and England, the Australian and New Zealand bush, the South African veldt, and the American prairie. They were also used to accompany singing of both hymns and secular music by London street musicians, the Salvation Army, performers in music halls and minstrel shows, and by sailors at sea.

The prototype of what later became known as the German concertina was invented by Carl Uhlig of Chemnitz, Saxony in 1834. This type of concertina became one of the first widely available, inexpensive, mass-produced consumer luxury items, a by-product of the rise of factory production and global trade. Although quickly supplanted within Germany by evolving, increasingly larger free-reed instruments, Uhlig's small one-, two-, and later three-row models caught on with working-class people around the world. English craftsmen copied its keyboard and improved on its mechanical parts (using technology borrowed from the Wheatstone English-system concertina) and, in doing so, created the closely related Anglo-German concertina, the name of which is today typically

shortened to "the Anglo". German and Anglo-German instruments spread quickly from Germany and England to distributors and shopkeepers in Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Africa, and North America. British and American sailors used them extensively at sea and spread the instruments, as well as the latest fashions in dance music, to all of their ports of call. Traders, missionaries, sailors, soldiers, and colonists introduced German concertinas to indigenous people in Africa, Australasia and North America.

Widely adopted for playing popular dance music and song tunes of the day, these instruments have an easy-to-learn diatonic 'push-and-pull' keyboard which gives music a natural bounce and drive. German and Anglo-German concertinas far surpassed in numbers and cultural impact their more elite cousin, the English concertina, and in a time well before the guitar was particularly popular, German and Anglo-German concertinas became favorite instruments in global popular culture. In a world before recorded music, radio, and television, the German concertina served as a combination home phonograph, piano, and juke-box among those of limited means or with limited access to the music of theatres and concert halls.

After a heyday that extended from the 1850s until the early twentieth century, German and Anglo-German concertinas were largely forgotten. By 1950, their last remaining players consisted of a few dozen musicians in rural County Clare Ireland, a few individuals in rural England, a few aging musicians in remote parts of the Australian bush, and a slightly more numerous playing population among Boer farmers and Zulu and Sotho migrant workers in South Africa. In recent years, usage of the concertina has significantly

rebounded and it has again become a truly global instrument.

Most of us who play the Anglo-German concertina today came to it by way of the great revival of interest in traditional music that has swept the globe in the last few decades—not by inheritance from an older family member or directly from a tradition of older players in our cities and towns. Because of the long middle-twentieth-century gap in the concertina's playing history, most of us know little about those who played them before our time, where and how they were played, and for what purposes. These two volumes are, in part, an attempt to fill in some of those gaps in our knowledge.

This book examines three aspects of German and Anglo-German concertinas: their history, including the processes of invention, manufacture, and marketing; a social history of those people around the world who played them; and an analysis of the evolution in styles and techniques of those who played these instruments from the late nineteenth century to the present. This report relies mostly upon primary sources—observations of their use taken from period newspapers, journals, diaries and books. Such first-hand observations have been difficult to gather in the past, but are readily available to the researcher today by means of digital search engines on the Internet as well as the digital archives of research libraries. Each “sighting” is merely an anecdote, but when combined and analyzed by the hundreds and thousands, a more coherent global picture emerges.

### **The social world of German and Anglo-German concertinas**

The results of such searches, focused upon the occurrence of an inexpensive working-class instrument distributed widely around the world, offer a unique snapshot of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century popular music and dance

and, indeed, of life in general at that time. The Victorian era represented the high water mark of the British Empire, when colonies expanded rapidly into formerly native lands. Many indigenous people of the nineteenth century world were at the tip of the spear of European expansion, and missionaries, soldiers and colonists (in America, ex-colonists) were the agents of that expansion. Both colonizers and many of the colonized played the concertina. With the colonists, it was a link to the latest popular dance fashions and songs from Europe and, increasingly, from America. Among indigenous people, playing the concertina was at times part of acculturation, voluntary or forced, and at other times became a wildly creative experiment in the use of a new, foreign instrument in a completely non-European musical context.

The degree of acceptance of the concertina among non-European people seems to have partly depended upon local indigenous musical norms. German and Anglo-German concertinas are based on a European seven note diatonic musical scale, with the additional notes for an eleven note chromatic scale added later as an afterthought. Pentatonic scales, used in many African and Pacific Islands cultures, are essentially a subset of the western diatonic scale, so the concertina was a useable instrument and gained some measure of acceptance in these cultures. On the other hand, Arabic music and Indian classical music commonly employ intervals of less than a semitone, so the rigidly diatonic scale of the concertina was not particularly useful in those cultures.

The concertina's heyday coincided with a worldwide nineteenth-century boom in European ballroom-style dancing—quadrilles, polkas, waltzes, schottisches, varsovianas and the like. The concertina played a large role in the composition and dispersal of the music for these dances in colonial Australia, New Zealand and

South Africa (especially among the Boers), as well as in England and Ireland. The pattern of concertina use for these dances was remarkably similar in each of these places. In rural areas, house or barn dances were the typical venues, and the concertina was often played solo for them, or perhaps was played along with an additional concertina or fiddle. New dances, most of which originated in continental Europe, migrated directly to each country. The bands of British military garrisons typically played a key role in introducing the latest dance and its dance rhythm, and the news spread quite rapidly to the most rural of areas. No part of the then-British Empire was too remote for these enormously popular and global ballroom dances, from the outback of Australia to the African veldt to the most conservative parts of Gaelic western Ireland.

Equally global in its penetration was the minstrel music craze that emanated from the United States in the nineteenth century. Minstrel troupes, frequently in blackface, were highly popular in England, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, and in the former British Cape Colony and Boer Republics of present-day South Africa. After the genre's initial introduction in each country by visiting American groups, new troupes were generated locally. The German concertina and the banjo were key instruments of this genre, and use of the banjo in popular and traditional music in all of these countries dates back to the days of the minstrel shows. The musical legacy of the minstrels includes significant parts of local repertoires of traditional dance music and song today. For example, the minstrel-composed tune *The Miller's Reel* has become the traditional Irish reel *The Dawn*. Cecil Sharp noted the English morris dance tune *Getting Upstairs* from Oxfordshire concertina player William Kimber, not knowing that it had originally been composed by an American for the minstrel shows. Such globally shared minstrel music as well as shared

ballroom dance tunes demonstrate the existence of a vibrant and global late nineteenth century pop culture. The mass-produced, globally marketed German concertina and button accordion (not to mention the banjo) played a musical role within this pop culture that was similar to that of the ubiquitous electric guitar today.

In Britain, the late nineteenth century was not a period of prosperity for working-class people at home, regardless of the expansion of the Empire. A pronounced drop in agricultural prices, caused by the low cost of imported North American grain and the development of more effective agricultural methods, caused a major and prolonged exodus of farm laborers from greatly impoverished rural areas. A small part of that exodus involved the departure to the cities of village professional and amateur musicians. Adoption of the inexpensive German concertina was one means by which remaining, musically unlettered rural people continued to make music, and the instrument gained a prominent role in traditional rural English social life—it was used in morris dance, mumming, social dancing, and church music. As migrating former farm workers arrived in English cities by the hundreds of thousands, many remained unemployed and were forced into the world of the street, so well described by Charles Dickens. The German concertina became a vibrant part of the ensuing much-loved and much-despised parade of London street music, as thousands sought to make a living by busking or by begging.

Neighboring Ireland had just emerged from the tragic years of the Great Famine, and most of its rural people would remain in poverty for many years. The process of migration of musicians out of rural areas experienced in Britain was magnified in Ireland, where most rural migrants left the country altogether. Music collector Francis O'Neill remarked upon the emptiness of the Irish countryside with respect to the old



professional class of fiddlers and pipers, many of whom became his immigrant musical sources in urban America. The inexpensive German concertina became popular at that time all over Ireland, and many observers remarked upon its presence in nearly every rural household, as rural people began to make their own instrumental music to a greater extent than ever before. The afore-mentioned continental European ballroom dance craze penetrated deep into the Irish countryside, with the German concertina often comprising the sole music for house dances that consisted of polkas, waltzes, and “sets” (quadrilles) in addition to native jigs and reels. The great attraction of these new ballroom dances in Ireland and elsewhere was that dancers were in couples, often facing each other with arms around waists, in dances that often lasted most of the night—heady stuff for the young of that era. The concertina and the banjo both drew the ire of Gaelic nationalists as “foreign” instruments that brought “foreign” dances into the last bastions of Gaelic culture. At the same time, the concertina was frequently used in various acts of political protest against the ongoing forces of British occupation, in both rural areas and in cities.

Existing histories of Sir Charles Wheatstone’s English-system concertina describe the world of genteel Victorian music salons and concert halls. In contrast, the history of the German and Anglo-German concertina is that of the working men and women upon whose backs that world was built—soldiers, sailors, missionaries, miners, ranchers, farmers, craftsmen, shopkeepers, Salvation Army workers, immigrants, the homeless on the street, and of course various native peoples. The Victorian world was one of sharply drawn class structure, and many first-hand accounts of German concertina use in England and America were written by a social elite that despised nearly every tune produced by it. Many if not most in the social

elite as well as in the popular press that courted their approval accepted no other musical standard than that of western classical music, and the extremely popular German concertina bore the brunt of their invectives. It was only by the efforts of the various folk music revivals, starting largely with that begun by England’s Cecil Sharp in the early twentieth century, that the elite learned to think more expansively about music. The first and most widely remembered of Cecil Sharp’s many musical sources played the Anglo-German concertina.

### **The evolution of playing styles and techniques**

The appropriateness of various types of ornamentation or the turn of a particular musical phrase provide topics of endless discussion for many involved in playing for traditional Irish and English folk music on the concertina today. It seems appropriate to review the evolution of styles and techniques of playing this instrument, both to see what has been deemed beautiful or appropriate by past generations and to see how and why these styles and techniques have evolved. A series of twenty-eight note-for-note transcriptions were made from early recordings of those who learned to play German and Anglo-German concertinas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Chapter 10). These transcriptions represent the playing of former musicians from England, Ireland, Australia, and South Africa; sadly, no recordings appear to have been made of Anglo-German concertina players of North America and New Zealand during that time frame, nor were any sailors recorded playing this most nautical of instruments. These transcriptions, as well as available period documents such as printed tutors and interviews with older players, show a remarkable evolution in playing styles in all of these countries since the late nineteenth century. These changes were driven primarily by concurrent dramatic, global-

scale changes in music and dance fashions.

Late nineteenth and earliest twentieth century playing techniques used by dance musicians in these four countries seem to have been remarkably similar. Tunes were played predominately in the key of C on instruments pitched in C and G, and the earliest players who were recorded almost universally used an octave technique (two notes played at once, an octave apart) throughout most of each piece played, with minimal other ornamentation. This style of playing was remarkably well suited to playing for ballroom dances in houses, barns, and wool sheds, where the noise level was high and where the dances lasted all night—a daunting task for any concertina player, as that player often played alone. Dancers demanded a clean beat that was easily heard, and the paying dancers usually got what they wanted. Although chording seems to have been uncommon in Australia and Ireland, England's William Kimber would add a third interval note to the lower octave note, making a partial chord on the left hand, whereas in South Africa players like Hans Bodenstein and Chris Chomse would add a similar third interval note, but to the right hand. These simple harmonic additions were done in ways that were easy to play, and added to the strength of the beat. During this period concertina playing reached its global zenith in popularity.

And then the worm turned. Out of America's melting pots came strikingly new music and dances: the age of ragtime, blues, and jazz had begun. Richly chromatic, this new music contained notes not available on the diatonic two-row German and Anglo-German concertinas that were owned by the majority of players. At the same time, once popular European ballroom dances gave way to a rapid succession of two-steps, the fox trot, the Black Bottom, and the Charleston. Ballroom dances and the concertina, with their closely symbiotic relationship, rapidly

waned. For those players who stuck with the instrument, change came to the concertina in two distinct waves. The first wave consisted of playing in larger bands for larger dances in larger public spaces; the second involved moving beyond playing for dances.

In Ireland, these global changes were partly preceded by the formation of the Irish State. In the nationalistic fervor that accompanied that process, the Gaelic League sought to replace ballroom dancing and newer, yet more sinister forms of terpsichorean cultural decline with figure dances from Kerry in newly designed céilí evenings. As that movement grew, the young Irish government enacted legislation for the licensing of public dances that effectively moved dances from country houses and crossroads, where they had been since time immemorial, to public dance halls. The result was the formation of céilí bands, which were to change the playing of music from a solo fiddle or concertina player for a house dance to one where a larger group of musicians was needed to play for a dance in a large public hall. The old octave playing in the key of C largely ceased, as concertina players now found themselves playing in the keys of G and D, and occasionally A and F, used by others in the band—fiddlers, pipers, accordions, and flutes. To accommodate playing in some of these additional keys, the once-ubiquitous German two-row concertina had to be replaced by a more expensive three-row instrument. These changes, as well as the concurrent arrival of the gramophone, decimated the numbers of concertina players around the country. A newer, smaller group of remaining concertina players, many with improved Anglo-German instruments, now switched to playing in single-note, along-the-row styles, better for playing in these keys. The larger music world in Ireland was split between those who went with the céilís, and those who went modern to the jazz age and beyond. The

concertina stayed only with the former, but in much reduced numbers. Its time had come and gone.

In South Africa, the new twentieth century came with ever-growing towns and a more settled landscape after the tumultuous and tragic years of the Boer Wars. As in Ireland, dances generally moved from houses to larger public spaces in these towns, and those larger dance venues required bands rather than solo players. In contrast to the situation in Ireland, the concertina retained its place of primacy among the Boer folk. It became the lead melody instrument in the new dance bands, and other additions (guitars, string bass, drums) existed only to add rhythmic volume. Here the new global chromatic music was welcomed rather than rejected. Concertina players met the challenge of this new music by dropping their old two-row German instruments and buying expanded-keyboard Wheatstone concertinas of thirty-eight and more keys, the better to play chromatically. As the twentieth century progressed, octave playing was increasingly replaced by heightened use of rhythmic and complex chords, as well as by complex forms of cross-row fingering. The 1920s to the 1940s marked the high point of the concertina-led dance bands of the Boer.

In Australia, New Zealand, America, and England, this was a time of disappearance and near-extinction of concertina playing, as few players successfully met the challenge imparted by new music and dance fashions. House dances continued only in remote parts of rural Australia, with the last remnants discovered in the middle twentieth century by collectors of the folk revival. By the middle of the twentieth century, only a few aging stragglers remained active in both Australia and England.

The second wave of twentieth-century change in concertina playing began with the emerging global revival in folk and traditional

music that arguably began in Greenwich Village in New York in the 1950s and then spread rapidly to Britain and its former colonies. As the folk movement picked up steam in England, a global concertina “revival” began there. Concertinas were prominently used in a second revival of morris dancing, and by the 1970s they were part of a renewal of rural English dance music. In Australia, folk music collector John Meredith and others who followed in his footsteps recorded the aging survivors of the rural house and barn dances (now termed “bush” dances). In Ireland, interest quickly grew in what was now called “traditional” music and dance. Irish dances in revival activities included the “foreign” set dances and polkas formerly reviled by the Gaelic League, and it now became acceptable to include the once-rejected banjo and concertina in official Irish traditional music circles. Fortunately, County Clare still had a small population of surviving concertina players to help guide younger players.

This late twentieth-century global revival of “traditional” music had one very clean and abrupt break with the past, however. In England, Ireland, and Boer South Africa, revival concertina playing became focused primarily on making music for *listening* rather than dancing, as the vast majority of the dancing public had long since left behind the old dances (including both nineteenth-century European ballroom styles as well as older forms) for twentieth-century dance fashions from the United States and from Latin America. Most revival concertina players inhabit pub sessions, competitions and festivals, and do not typically play for old-style house or other social dances (although some in England play for the morris, a ritual dance). This change has had a profound effect on the way the instrument is played. Three distinct new “listening-oriented” playing styles have emerged in this second wave, each more complex in its techniques than that of a preceding generation of players. In Ireland, the effect of

competitions and the new focus on listening met its new master in Clare concertina player Paddy Murphy, who added rich new ornamentation borrowed from other instruments as well as alternative scales to iron out phrasing issues, thereby elevating the instrument to a new level. His disciples, Noel Hill chief among them, spread and expanded this new musical gospel, which by now only superficially resembles the simple octave playing of those concertinists of two generations earlier. This new style of richly ornamented playing has become a global phenomenon, taking Irish concertina music well beyond the borders of Ireland.

In England, the last few of the old players had passed away before much was done to record them. In the general absence of living exponents of traditional styles, a new generation listened to the few recordings of William Kimber (d. 1961), as well as to English melodeon music, and developed a second highly innovative style of concertina playing. It consists of melodeon-like oom-pah chords on the left hand that are completely separated from the movements of the right hand, which plays melody. This style is quite unlike that of Kimber, who never traveled far from his octave roots where the two hands move in parallel. Pushing this new way of playing to the extreme, many English revival players acquired concertinas pitched in G and D, the better to play in that style with string musicians. Although not all Anglo-German concertinists in England play in this manner, enough do that the new genre is sometimes termed "English-style Anglo playing."

Finally, in South Africa, yet a third new style has developed. Intensely chromatic, it features a great degree of smooth fluidity in phrasing, gained by playing complete phrases—and sometimes even entire pieces—in one direction of the bellows. Boers use their multi-row, extended-keyboard Wheatstone Anglo-German concertinas to play not only the Boer

dance classics of yesteryear, but modern songs and dance tunes from global popular music. Complex chords and chromatic passages are commonplace. Of all the current concertina dialects worldwide, the Boers have embraced musical modernity to the fullest extent. As is the case in Ireland and England, however, this new style graces sessions, festival concerts, and CDs much more often than it does the dance floor.

Inevitably, there has been a reaction to the relative disappearance of dance. The old schottisches, quadrille tunes and polkas are fine to listen to, but for many the feet were made to do more than toe-tap. In Australia, a significant movement to bring back the old "bush" ballroom dances has sprung up, with a small parallel movement to revive the Anglo concertina there. Early efforts in the 1980s were modernist in featuring electric guitars and the like, but bush groups today increasingly tend to tone down to a smaller and gentler acoustic scale more in keeping with old rural practice. In South Africa, recent years have seen an interesting counter-movement among some players away from the highly modern, fluid, and stylized technique on extended keyboard Anglo-German concertinas, back to the old two-row German-style *boerekoncertina*. No such fully "retro" concertina movement has yet arisen in Ireland and England.

Regardless of such splinter movements, the three new modernist revival styles are very much in the ascendancy, the Irish style chief amongst them. Largely as a result, the Anglo-German concertina is experiencing a marked rise in global popularity after having successfully acclimated itself to a new, radically different twenty-first century cultural setting. A plethora of new concertina builders, repairers, websites and supporting organizations have developed around the globe in the last three decades. The future of the Anglo concertina, once very much in question, now seems bright.

## **The roughness of the nineteenth-century world: some caveats**

The Anglo-German concertina was revived and reborn in the late twentieth century largely as a middle class “folk” instrument. Those today who typically encounter fellow Anglo concertina players in weekend music workshops in bucolic settings may be a bit shocked to see it and its German concertina cousin in their former habitat. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, these were predominantly working class instruments in an exceedingly rough Victorian world—a world that was shaped by severe class distinctions, ideologies of empire-building, and racial stereotyping. Quotations from firsthand period accounts used throughout this narrative reflect this world, and some of them contain terms and attitudes concerning class and race that are unacceptable today, regardless of how they were intended at the time. Those accounts, however flawed, are important guides to the concertina’s use during that era.

The concertina’s use in blackface minstrelsy—a form of entertainment that was popular in the nineteenth century in every country where the concertina was prominent—involved edgy and typically racist lyrics and skits. Some descriptions written by early explorers and settlers about musical encounters with various indigenous people are either racially charged or thoughtlessly

condescending. In Britain and in America, descriptions penned by the social elite and the Victorian press about working class concertina players are often condescending and in some cases inflammatory.

At the same time, there is much of beauty in the majority of firsthand accounts of the concertina’s use by the strong and resilient people who played it. These include a description of some rather shy young people enjoying a cross-roads dance in County Mayo, Ireland, and a description of a group of ex-slaves dancing at sunset on the open prairie in coastal Texas—celebrating their new freedom. They also include a charming account of Maoris and New Zealand colonists sharing a Christmas dance on a remote offshore island, as well as a description of Christmas house dances in rural Cornwall. Of Boer farm families dancing on the dirt floor of a small house, stopping frequently to water down the choking dust that rose from the floor. Of just-landed Australian immigrants playing for an impromptu dance near their tents along the shore, and of an English morris team dancing in the snow. Of groups of Zulu and Sotho migrant workers in long treks from their homelands to South African gold mines, playing the concertina to help set the rhythm and ease their passage. Of a sailor lying on the deck of a full rigged ship, his day’s work done, playing his concertina and singing to the stars.

## Acknowledgments

A book of this scope is never produced alone. I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of a great number of volunteer reviewers in various countries—expert players and/or historians all—who provided essential knowledge and information on their own concertina cultures, and helped to correct my inevitable blunders in individual chapters. Reviewers of Chapters 1 and 2 were Englishmen Roger Digby, Stephen Chambers, and Harry Scurfield, as well as an American, Randall Merris. In addition, Stephen Chambers generously provided many illustrations for these two chapters. An earlier version of Chapter 3 was read critically by Irishmen Noel Hill and Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, as well as New Yorker Allan Atlas. Ó hAllmhuráin also reviewed later revisions to it. Editors of Chapter 4 included Maine nautical historian Robert L. Webb, nautical concertina aficionado John Townley, and Roger Digby. Chapter 5 was greatly aided by the generous help of South Africans Kalie de Jager, Sean Minnie, Wilhelm Schultz, and Zak van der Vyver, as was Chapter 6 by Harry Scurfield. Australians Peter Ellis, Bob Bolton, and Warren Fahey helped enormously with Chapter 7, and New Zealanders David Gardiner and Phil Garland cast a helpful eye on Chapter 8. An earlier version of Chapter 9 benefitted from the comments of Canadian Robin Harrison and American Randall Merris. Each did his level best to keep me straight. Any remaining blunders are entirely of my own making.

Essential to the success of this volume were the careful efforts of a volunteer copy editor, also a concertina player: Judy Patch of Nacogdoches, Texas. Her painstaking and patient work with an often grammatically and stylistically challenged writer greatly improved this book.

A myriad of others have helped in the last

few years with information, advice, and illustrations. At the risk of leaving out someone—for which, my apologies!—they include, in no particular order, Geoffrey Crabb; Tony Marshall; Mark Davies; Graham Henderson; David Barnett; Katie Howson; John Dipper; Will Duke; Alan Day; Federico Wünsch; Alex Cadogan and Alex von der Becke of the Salvation Army in Britain; Debbie Moseley of my local Fulshear Public Library; Henrik Müller; Charles Marshall; Wes Williams; Chris Algar; Chris Flint; Margaret Birley and the staff of the Horniman Museum; Gavin Atkin; Robert Gaskins; Howard Jones; Jody Kruskal; David Savage; the staff of Rice University's Fondren Library in Houston; Greg Jowaises; Wally Carroll; Nancy Bessent; Alex West; Rod Thompson; Malcolm Taylor at the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library of the English Folk Dance and Song Society in London; Jeff Lefferts; Nicholas Carroll and Jackie Small, as well as Treasa Harkin of the Irish Traditional Music Archive in Dublin; Séamus Fogarty; Peter Laban; Chris Corlett; Tony Kearns; Jim Carroll; Críostóir Mac Carthaigh and Anna Bale at the National Folklore Collection at University College Dublin; The National Library of Ireland; Marie Stephens and Mary MacNamara of Tulla Comhaltas; Bill Mullaly; Alan Clarke; Bill Ochs; Siobhán Long; Siobhán Ní Chonaráin at the archives of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann; Ian Roome; Leo Dalton; George Salley; John Townley; Paul Schwartz; Rod Stradling; Doug McCarthy at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich England; Michelle Walsh of the Merseyside Maritime Museum in Liverpool; Jim Hiscott; John Elsbury; Timothy Siers of the Royal Australian Navy; Harold Herrington; Bryan Creer; Rachel Howarth of the Houghton Library at Harvard University; the staff of the State Library

of Victoria, Australia; Peer Ehmke of the Schlossbergmuseum of Chemnitz, Germany; LaVern J. Rippley; Bert Duplessis; Wia Kotze; Malisa Janes; Shaun Williamson; Ben Otto; Kevin Leamon at the State Library of New South Wales, Australia; the Alexander Turnbull Library in New Zealand; Chris Ghent; Keith Klippel; Rob Willis; Ray and Jenny Simpson; Catherine Aldersey and the staff of the National Library of Australia in Canberra; John Whiteoak; Peter Cuffley; Rosemary Richardson; Malcolm Clapp; Richard Evans; the Mitchell Library of the State Library of New South Wales, Australia; the Powerhouse

Museum of Sydney, Australia; Archivist Susan Mitchem, at the Salvation Army's National Headquarters in Virginia; Major Gloria Stepke of the Salvation Army's Central Division Historical Museum in Des Plaines Illinois; the library at the University of North Carolina at Chappell Hill; Director Vern Swanson of the Springville Museum of Art in Utah; and Jared Snyder. Thanks and more thanks to all.

Finally—last, but hardly least—I thank my wife, Mary Ryan Worrall, for her cheerful encouragement and support of all my musical activities.

Dan Worrall  
Fulshear, Texas  
December 8, 2009

# Chapter 1. Invention, Production, and Marketing of German System Concertinas

*Charlie Jeffries was a tinker, in the 1870s, who used to go round with a barrow mending pots and pans. When he didn't get any tinkers' work, he used to busk on the concertina. People would say "we like that, can you get us one made?" So that's how he got started.*

—Harry Crabb, in a 1970 interview<sup>1</sup>

## *Background: Concertina Types Discussed in this Book*

Nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century concertinas and accordions came in a bewildering array of types and models, a by-product of the explosive evolution of free-reed musical instruments in that era. This book concentrates on *German* and *Anglo-German* concertinas, which share a simple diatonic keyboard and which were the concertina of choice for many rural and urban working class musicians around the world. Other types of concertinas include the English concertina and various types of duet concertinas, made in England, and the large Chemnitz, Carlsfelder and Bandoncon concertinas made in Germany. Before proceeding, some background descriptive information on these various types of concertinas may be useful to some readers. Historical details of the German and Anglo German concertinas are treated in a later section.

### **German system concertinas**

The keyboard of the *German concertina* (Figure 1) typically includes one or (more usually) two rows of buttons, with each row playing a diatonic major scale. These two rows are most commonly in the keys of C and G, although many other keys are used. Each button plays a different note when pushed than when pulled, unlike those of English and duet system concertinas (see below), which play the same

note on the pull and the push. The push-pull system used in German concertinas is not only economic in numbers of reeds needed (less redundancy), but the necessary direction changes of the bellows when the instrument is used impart a bouncy lift to music played. Working- and middle-class British players enthusiastically adopted these instruments in and following the middle of the nineteenth century, but these inexpensive instruments were generally scorned by the musical elite as being of variable quality and, more importantly, incapable of playing the full chromatic scale. *Anglo-German concertinas* (Figure 2) have the same two-row push-pull keyboard, but use greatly improved reeds and mechanical action borrowed from the English concertina. Most today have an upper third row of buttons that contain, in part, the missing notes of the chromatic scale. The term *Anglo-German concertina* is typically shortened to *Anglo concertina* in current usage. Ones with a third row of keys are sometimes (but uncommonly) called *Anglo-chromatic concertinas*.

In practice, German concertinas, Anglo-German concertinas, and Anglo-Chromatic concertinas are very closely related and were all played during the Victorian period, but no single convenient name encompasses this group. The term *German system concertina* here denotes the full group, as the unifying factor is the German diatonic, push-pull system of arranging the notes on the instruments.



## **The English concertina**

Invented by Sir Charles Wheatstone in England slightly before the German system, the English concertina (Figure 3) is fully chromatic, and each button plays the same note on the push as on the pull. Buttons are arranged so that all notes on lines on a musical staff are on the left hand, and all notes on spaces are on the right; a player “walks” up the keyboard, alternating between fingers on the left and right hands. This keyboard allows great ease in playing scale runs, because unlike the two-row German system keyboard, frequent changes in bellows direction are not required. In the hands of the less skilled, however, it lacks the ready bounce of its German cousin. Because English concertinas were handcrafted in small numbers, prices were higher than the German concertina by a factor of ten to twenty times. Well adapted to chromatic western classical music, they were adopted early on by the wealthy. Neil Wayne<sup>2</sup> and Allan Atlas,<sup>3</sup> among others, have extensively documented the English concertina’s development and use in Victorian England.

## **Duet concertinas**

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, several types of duet concertinas were designed, including the Maccann (Figure 4), Triumph/Crane, and Jeffries systems. Each button on a duet plays the same note on the push as on the pull, like the English system, but these instruments contain a reasonably complete compass on each hand, enabling the melody to be isolated on one hand, and chords or countermelody on the other, in a fashion similar to the German system. English craftsmen built duets in relatively small numbers, and professional musicians played them extensively in the music halls. Much of the existing documentation on their history and use may be found online at The Concertina Library, <http://www.concertina.com>.

## **Chemnitzer, Carlsfeld, and Bandoneon concertinas**

In Germany and central Europe, the early two-row German concertina was quickly superseded by much larger instruments with multiple voices and up to five rows of keys. Like their direct ancestor, the two row German concertina, they played a different note on the push than on the pull. The multiple voices entailed two, three or even four notes that sounded when a single button was pushed. This gave added volume and bite to the music played. These extra voices could be tuned in unison, in octaves, or in tremelo (with one note tuned a bit off, for a wobbly effect). The additional rows of keys allow more extensive chording, always a top criterion for players in Germany and the rest of continental Europe. Of these larger keyboard, typically square-ended instruments, the most important keyboard systems are those of the *Chemnitzer* (Figure 5), *Carlsfeld*, and *Bandoneon* concertinas. All are extensively altered from the original diatonic arrangement of the German concertina. Of these, the Chemnitzer is still played among people of German, Czech, and Polish ancestry in the American Midwest, and the Bandoneon is popular in Argentina. Extensive documentation of these instruments is to be found in Dunkel<sup>4</sup> and Rippley.<sup>5</sup>

German system (German and Anglo-German) concertinas were an order of magnitude more popular than any other of these other systems in nineteenth- and twentieth-century England, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, North America, and South Africa. This book, consequently, focuses on those instruments.



Figure 1. Two row German concertina, late nineteenth century. Built in Germany, it was originally sold or repaired in Canterbury, Kent. From the collection of Stephen Chambers.



Figure 2. Three row Anglo-German concertina, built by English maker George Jones, ca. 1862. © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.



Figure 3. English concertina by Louis Lachenal, ca. 1870. With thanks to Stephen Chambers.



Figure 4. Maccann duet concertina, made by Lachenal ca. 1900. With thanks to Robert Gaskins and The Concertina Library, [www.concertina.com](http://www.concertina.com).



Figure 5. Bandonion by Alfred Arnold, Carlsfeld Germany, ca. 1890. Chemnitzer and Carlsfeld concertinas have a similar appearance, with the differences lying in the keyboard design. With thanks to LaVern J. Rippley.

## Development of the German Concertina

In the early nineteenth century, continental Europe witnessed an explosion of interest and invention in free-reed instruments, following the importation to Europe of the Chinese *sheng* the previous century. The early history of European free-reed instruments is poorly known. The *aeolina* (Figure 6), a metal plate containing several metal free reeds, is usually credited to Christian Buschmann in 1821 (who called it an *aura*), although it is possible that it was invented a few years later, and possibly by someone else.<sup>6</sup> In use, one brought the aeoline to the mouth to sound individual notes, using the lips to isolate individual reeds. German aeolines, the first popular free-reed instruments in Europe, were present at German street fairs from about 1825. They were brought to England by 1827, and Sir Charles Wheatstone built some of his own there by 1828.<sup>7</sup> Numerous persons in Austria and Germany worked to improve upon this device by adding a housing around the reed block for ease of playing. By 1829 the Glier brothers began production of these mouth harmonicas in the Klingenthal area of Saxony, in the Erzgebirge (Ore Mountains Range) near the Czech border. This production established this region as a predominant center for free-reed production for over a century (Figure 7). Wheatstone's own effort in improving upon the aeoline resulted in his *symphonium* of 1829, a keyed mouth-driven device that was itself short-lived, but ultimately resulted in the keyboard of the English concertina.

The effort to provide bellows-driven, rather than mouth-driven, power to free-reed devices started early, and many participated in the quest. Among them, Anton Haeckl reportedly invented the *physharmonica* in Vienna in 1818. This was a harmonium-like piano keyboard connected to free reeds, and powered by a bellows. Two of his instruments from 1825 are still on display at the Vienna Technical Museum.<sup>8</sup> A similar instrument is attributed to Johann Caspar Schlimbach and his cousin Bernhard Eschenbach, also in Vienna in the 1820s.<sup>9</sup> In 1829, Cyrill Demian (1772-1847) in Vienna linked this

technology to a set of bellows and buttons, producing the first *accordion*. This instrument played a succession of chords when each single key was pressed, which rigidly harmonized every note played; later models allowed the playing of individual notes. Soon, Demian's one-row accordion as well as other competing models by other makers incorporated the now familiar push-pull, diatonic scale known in modern button accordions, harmonicas, and German concertinas.<sup>10</sup>

Figure 6. The Aeolina. From the *German Aeolian Tutor*, 1830, Willis & Co., London.

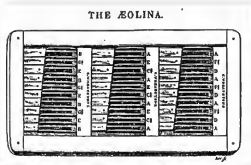




Figure 7. Relief map of Saxony and its Erzgebirge (Ore Mountains), with nineteenth and early twentieth century concertina- and accordion-making areas marked with stars. The inset map, lower right, shows the location of Saxony within modern Germany.



Figure 8. Carl Friedrich Uhlig (1789-1874), inventor of the German concertina.

## Uhlig and the first German-system concertina

Amidst this frenzy of scientific and commercial interest in free reed instruments, the instrument we know today as the Anglo concertina had its origin in the town of Chemnitz, also in Saxony (Figure 7), in 1834. Carl Friedrich Uhlig (1789-1874; Figure 8) was born and raised at Bernsdorf, near Chemnitz, and apprenticed in the manufacture of stockings. By 1819, bored with this career, he had established a musical instrument store in Chemnitz, and he played clarinet in a local orchestra. He began to experiment with free reeds, but was dissatisfied with the keyboard of Demian's early accordion. He envisioned taking one of Demian's single-row accordions, which had a push-pull diatonic scale, and cutting it in half, placing that keyboard under the fingers of two hands rather than one, thus increasing ease of play. A side benefit of this keyboard design was that it also allowed simple harmonies to be added on the left hand (the lower end of the multi-octave keyboard), while the right hand played a melody in the upper octave. He called this ten-button, single-row instrument "an accordion of a new type," in an advertisement in the *Chemnitzer Anzeiger* of July 19, 1834.<sup>11</sup>

Although he had no new name for this instrument (he usually called it an accordion), English merchants seem to have later named it the *German concertina* (see below). Within a few years, Uhlig had produced a two-row model that contained the organization familiar today: two rows of buttons, each button playing a different note on the push than the pull, and each row playing a multi-octave diatonic scale. The two rows were set a fifth interval apart in pitch. Modern German and Anglo-German concertinas contain essentially the same core keyboard.

In London, Charles Wheatstone's 1829 patent for his mouth-driven symphonium included a drawing of a bellows-driven symphonium. By 1833, if not earlier, he had prepared a prototype of what was later to be called the *concertina* (and later still, the *English concertina*).<sup>12</sup> It is unlikely that either Uhlig or Wheatstone knew of the other's work; the two instruments (the German concertina and the

English concertina) appear to have been independent developments, both largely the result of the explosive developments in European free-reed technology the previous three decades.

Back in Saxony, Uhlig began significant production of his new instrument by the middle 1830s, from his shop at Am Anger 902, Chemnitz<sup>13</sup> and marketed them in London by at least 1846. In 1847, he was the first producer of these instruments at the Leipzig international fair. Smaller one- and two-row instruments, popular for export, were followed by three- and four-row models sporting as many as 76 keys. Over time, these larger instruments evolved into the Chemnitzer, Carlsfeld, and Bandoneon concertinas, discussed above.

## Uhlig's followers expand the trade

Uhlig never patented his invention and instead spread its manufacture by training family members and employees, many of whom went on to found their own concertina firms. Johann David Wünsch (1814-1895) was born in Hartmannsdorf, approximately ten kilometers northwest of Chemnitz and, like Uhlig, was first apprenticed to make stockings. An avid musician from childhood, he joined the village orchestra in nearby Penig in 1831 and by 1838 became a trombonist in the Chemnitz orchestra. There he met Carl Uhlig's daughter, marrying her in 1839. At or before that time, he began to work for Uhlig, and the newly married couple soon moved in with the Uhligs. In Wünsch's words, "When in our new accommodation, I still worked for the business of my father-in-law Uhlig, with accordion bellows, cases and so on. With whom I also invented the concertina and published suitable tutors."<sup>14</sup> Given that statement, it is possible that Wünsch was working for Uhlig as early as 1834, when the later-termed concertina was invented.

Wünsch (Figure 9) had a troubled relationship with the Uhligs, especially with his "difficult" mother-in-law. Within six months, he and his wife moved out of the Uhlig's house, but he continued to work in Uhlig's shop, in what Wünsch termed a "somewhat depressing

position." In 1844, he traveled to Berlin and met other musicians, who offered him a job in the Berlin orchestra. In February 1847 the couple left Chemnitz for Berlin for that post. The elder Uhlig visited Berlin in late spring of that year to try to convince the couple to return. Carl Uhlig observed that the job with the orchestra was no "life position," and asked him to return. Even though he liked his position in Berlin, Wunsch was willing to give Chemnitz and Carl Uhlig another chance. He sent his wife back to Chemnitz and after several weeks of touring, to which he was contractually bound, he returned to Chemnitz to his wife and his newborn son. He immediately took up work again with Uhlig, but disagreements put an end to the relationship yet again. After nine months, he followed the advice of two friends and moved to Leipzig, where in his words,

*Since I had sufficient knowledge of concertina making, I here set up a small workshop and started manufacturing on my own. I also taught the playing of the concertina. My first pupils were a 72-year old shoemaker, a 52-year old lawyer and a young Count.<sup>15</sup>*



Figure 9. Johann David Wunsch, son-in-law of Uhlig, and early builder of the German concertina. From his autobiography of 1894.

Concertina-building was always just a money-earning proposition for Wunsch, however. In Leipzig he became a self-educated contra-bassist for the Leipzig Theatre and of the Gewandhaus, where he was associated with Mendelssohn, Schumann, and other great conductors. His wife died in 1860, apparently ending all connection with the Uhligs.

Another of Uhlig's daughters married Friedrich Anton Lange, who also worked for Uhlig in what became a happier relationship. Lange became a master craftsman and worked in Uhlig's shop for many years. When Uhlig retired in 1863, he turned over his enterprise to Lange, who produced high quality concertinas, especially of the Chemnitz variety, for many years.

Three other Uhlig employees became important early builders. By at least 1840, Johann Gottlieb Höselbarth, a former master weaver, began production of these instruments in Chemnitz after learning the trade in Uhlig's shop. His son, Julius August Höselbarth, succeeded him in his concertina trade. This family business continued into the 1890s.<sup>16</sup> Christian Friedrich Pirner, also of Chemnitz and another former employee of Uhlig, was making instruments at least by 1850.<sup>17</sup> Figure 10 shows several early Uhlig-type one- and two-row concertinas. The one in the middle row, right side, is signed (in its interior) by Pirner.

Christian Friedrich Reichel (b. 1811) of the village of Jahnsdorf was, like Uhlig, originally a stocking maker and was "adopted" into Carl Uhlig's home in the early 1830s. He learned to build concertinas in Uhlig's shop before branching out on his own in Chemnitz. An advertisement from the Chemnitz city address book of 1855 (Figure 11) shows a rich array of concertinas with from one to five rows of keys, with four, six, and eight sides, and even one completely round-ended model. This diversity of styles reflects the instruments' immediate popularity. Figure 12 shows what appears to be one of his eight-sided instruments in an image from an 1855 Glasgow tutor. By 1856 he had moved to nearby Waldheim and was a successful producer and wholesaler of free-reed instruments

throughout the 1860s. It is thought that he emigrated with his family from Saxony to Wisconsin in 1870. His business in Saxony was taken over by Carl August Seifert.<sup>18</sup>

Figure 10. Six early Uhlig-style square German concertinas, circa 1840s-1850s. Christian Friedrich Pimer built the two row instrument in the middle row, right side; the rest are from unknown makers. From the collection of Stephen Chambers.



Figure 12. Drawing of a gentleman holding an eight-sided German concertina, probably built by C. F. Reichel (see Figure 11). From *The Concertina Preceptor*, a tutor of 1855 published in Glasgow. From Stuart Eydmann, *The Life and Times of the Concertina* (2005), [www.concertina.com](http://www.concertina.com).



Figure 11. Advertisement of the Christian Friedrich Reichel accordion factory, from the Chemnitz city address book of 1855, showing various shapes and sizes of German concertinas, as well as a harmonium. Reichel was an adopted son of Carl Uhlig. With thanks to Peer Ehmke and the *Schlossbergmuseum*, Germany.

### The first tutors for the “Accordion” and “German Concertina”

The oldest known tutor for the German concertina, written in German, is thought to have been published between 1837 and 1840 and has been attributed to Höselbarth. It provided instruction for a two-row, 20-button Uhlig-style instrument, then still called an *Accordion*, as Uhlig had termed it. The cover of this publication is shown in Figure 13, and the full tutor is available online.<sup>19</sup> It is possible that Wunsch, an accomplished musician in addition to a builder of the instrument, may have written it. He claimed that he “published suitable tutors” for the instrument while working for Uhlig; both Höselbarth and Wunsch worked for Uhlig during the 1830s. Several of the tunes in that tutor show the musical arrangement skill of the composer-writer, such as the *schottische* shown in Figure 14. Along with other new ballroom dances of the middle and late nineteenth century, *schottisches* were to accompany German and later Anglo-German concertinas around the world.

Carlo Minasi, the London-born son of an Italian immigrant, published over forty tutors for concertinas and other instruments. His tutor of 1846 for the German concertina (Figures 15 and 16), the first for that instrument in the English language, shows that it had not only reached London by this time, but that sales were large enough to require an English language tutor.<sup>20</sup> Minasi's tutor of 1846 and an advertisement in the October 22, 1846 edition of *The Times* mark the first known uses of the term *German concertina* in print (Figure 17). The advertisement markets the musical teaching services of “A gentleman, of great eminence in the profession, and of 20 years' experience in several of the highest continental musical schools, especially of the conservatoire Royale at Naples,” undoubtedly a reference to Minasi. Because German manufacturers like Uhlig and Höselbarth were using the term *Accordion* at that time for this new instrument, Minasi may have been responsible for giving it its new English name, *German Concertina*. Another possibility is that London toy retailer Kleyser & Tritschler,<sup>21</sup>

who imported these instruments and published Minasi's tutor, named them *German concertinas* as a marketing ploy, playing off their superficial resemblance to the much more expensive English concertinas that were showing up in the hands of the English upper crust.<sup>22</sup> Either way, the name stuck with English merchants from that time.

Both the Höselbarth tutor of 1837-1840 and the Minasi tutor of 1846 show the familiar two-row, 20-button keyboard design for an instrument keyed in C and G; Figure 18 shows Minasi's keyboard diagram. The upper row is in the key of C, and the lower row is in the key of G. This keyboard arrangement, with two rows keyed a fifth apart, has remained the standard for all German and Anglo-German concertinas to this day; three-row chromatic concertinas add a third row of accidentals but keep to the standard design of the bottom two rows. Moreover, the keys of C and G continue to be the keys most requested and used to the present day, although models in many other keys are made (especially G/D, D/A, and Bb/F).

### Carl Zimmerman and other early builders in Saxony

Regardless of the actions of English merchants, German builders in the 1830s and 1840s used the term *Accordion* or even *Harmonika* for Uhlig's invention, but that changed after the London Exposition of 1851. At that Exhibition, three early builders of English system concertinas showed their wares (Wheatstone and Company, Rock Chidley, and George Case). Also at the exhibition was Carl Friedrich Zimmerman (1817-1898), who displayed Uhlig-style ten- and twenty-keyed, one- and two-row “accordions,” as well as some three-row models that he called “chromatic concert harmonicas,” all of his own manufacture.

Zimmerman (Figure 19) was born in poverty in the iron foundry town of Morgenröthe in Saxony. He nonetheless learned to play the clavier by his 12<sup>th</sup> year, quickly learned several other instruments, and formed a dance group. Apprenticed by his father to an iron foundry, he pursued music with his friends in his spare time,



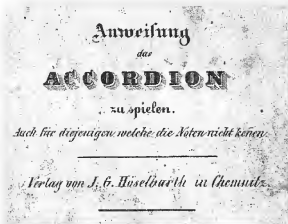


Figure 13. Title page for the first known tutor for the German concertina, ca. 1837-1840, published by concertina builder Johann Gottlieb Höslebarth of Chemnitz. Available online at [The Concertina Library](http://TheConcertinaLibrary.com), [www.concertina.com](http://www.concertina.com).



Figure 14. A fully arranged dance tune from the Höslebarth tutor. From the beginning, its German makers saw the concertina as a duet-style instrument, with melody played on the right hand, and chords on the left. In standard concertina notation the buttons on a two-row instrument are numbered 1-5 on the top row, and 6-10 on the bottom row, on each of the left and right sides. Numbers above the staff are for the right side buttons, and numbers below the staff are for the left.

Figure 15. Carlo Minasi's 1846 tutor for the German Concertina. Available online at The Concertina Library, [www.concertina.com](http://www.concertina.com).



Figure 16. A waltz from Carlo Minasi's 1846 tutor for the German Concertina. Like the earlier tutor published by Höselbarth, this work emphasized a duet-like approach to the instrument.

**WALTZ.**

**No. 7.**

**MUSIO, Pianoforte, Singing, Concertina, and German Concertina.**—A gentleman, of great eminence in the profession, and of 20 years' experience in several of the highest continental musical schools, especially of the Conservatoire Royale at Naples, is desirous of having a few PUPILS to TEACH, either at his own house or at their residence, if near the Regent's-park or Camden Villas. Terms moderate. Address P. P. P., at Pace's library, 19, Brecknock-place, Camden-road, Camden New-town.

Figure 17. Earliest known advertisement using the term *German concertina*, from *The Times*, London, October 22, 1846. The instructor was probably Carlo Minasi, who published a tutor for the instrument that same year.

UPPER ROW LEFT HAND.					UPPER ROW RIGHT HAND.				
1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
C Press G Draw	G Press B Draw	C Press D Draw	E Press F Draw	G Press A Draw	B Draw C Press	D Draw E Press	F Draw G Press	A Draw C Press	B Draw E Press
LOWER ROW LEFT HAND.					LOWER ROW RIGHT HAND.				
G Press D Draw O	D Press F Draw O	G Press A Draw O	B Press C Draw O	D Press E Draw O	F Draw G Press X	A Draw B Press X	C Draw D Press X	E Draw G Press X	F Draw B Press X

Figure 18. Keyboard arrangement for a twenty button, two row German concertina keyed in C and G, from Minasi's tutor of 1846. See text for explanation.

Figure 19. Charles Friedrich Zimmerman (1817-1898), early concertina builder from Carlsfeld. From LaVerne J. Rippley, *The Chemnitz Concertina: A History and an Accolade*, 2006.



Figure 20. Advertisement for Carl Friedrich Uhlig's concertina and harmonium factory in Chemnitz, from the *Chemnitzer Tageblatt und Anzeiger* of Dec. 15, 1866. By this time, Uhlig was using the new term *concertina* to describe his product. With thanks to Peer Ehmke and the Schlossbergmuseum, Germany.

**Die Harmonika-Fabrik**  
**von C. F. Uhlig, untere Brüdernstraße Nr. 4,**  
 empfiehlt ihr Lager von **Harmonikas, Concertinas, Melophon, Phys-**  
**harmonikas,** sowie **Planinos und Flügel,** verbunden mit **Harmonium**  
 (patent.) zur gefälligen Beachtung.  
**NB.** Auch sind die neuesten Schnupfackelbösen mit Rußk wieder vorrätig.

using earnings to pay for his clothes. Leaving this trade, and briefly pursuing the lace trade, he became a popular player of an early three-row version of Uhlig's new "harmonica" (as he termed it in his autobiography). In 1840, he received a glowing review of his playing in a Danzig (Germany, later Poland) newspaper, which termed him the "most wonderful artist of [musical] tone in Germany." With this, he decided to build the instrument and improve further upon Uhlig's invention.

With limited funds, he bought a few tools and materials and, in a small room in his father's house, he built a single-row concertina, and then two more. His business grew, and he engaged the services of woodsmen and nailmakers from a local wall clock factory, eventually employing 76 persons in his Carlsfeld factory. Ultimately, his "improvements" were to become his three-row, 45-key chromatic concertina with his *Carlsfelder* keyboard system, unveiled at the Industrial Exposition in Paris in 1849 and shown at the London Exposition of 1851. The free reed-trade was extremely competitive, however, and he was habitually undercapitalized. He eventually sold the business to Louis Arnold. Zimmerman then joined his brother-in-law in a glass-blowing enterprise. When that failed, he immigrated to Philadelphia in 1864, taking over his brother's musical instrument shop there. He ultimately invented and popularized the autoharp, and later sold that company.<sup>23</sup> He died in Philadelphia in 1898 when he was run over by a horse-drawn omnibus.

While Zimmerman was exhibiting his wares at the aforementioned London Exposition of 1851, he may have noticed that London businessmen were marketing the Uhlig-style one- and two-row "accordions" that he exhibited as "German concertinas" (as Carlo Minasi's tutor and the advertisement of 1846 indicate). It is thus possible that he brought the term *German concertina* back to Saxony following the Exposition.<sup>24</sup> Regardless of whether or not that was indeed the case, from that time German makers began to use the term *concertina* in their export trade. Zimmerman may have also brought back the idea that this "concertina" should mimic

the hexagonal shape of the popular but much more expensive English concertina. Certainly, by 1854 some German concertinas had assumed this new hexagonal shape, as Coleman's tutor of that year shows (Figure 22). Hexagonal one- (Figure 23) and two-row (Figure 1) models, which never caught on in Germany, were made for export, primarily to English-speaking players in England, its colonies, and the United States. Domestic concertina players in Germany and surrounding countries, along with their Germanic and Slavic immigrant counterparts in the United States, preferred the much larger, square-ended and multi-voiced instruments with four and even five rows of keys that developed in the late 1840s and 1850s: the *Chemnitzer*, *Carlsfelder*, and *Bandoneon* concertinas (Figure 24).

Most of the smaller two-row models exported to England were keyed in C and G, and contained only one accidental. However, German three-row chromatic models were commonly available by the 1850s, as a portion of the title page from an 1858 tutor shows (Figure 25).



Figure 21. Coule's tutor of 1852, London, which displays the square shape of the original Uhlig concertina. With thanks to Randall Merris.



Figure 22. Coleman's tutor of 1854, London shows that the new hexagonal shape, adapted from the English system concertina, was available. With thanks to Randall Merris.

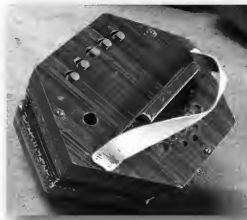


Figure 23. Early hexagonal one row German concertina, ca. late 1850s. Builder's name not known. From the collection of Stephen Chambers.

The free-reed industry in Saxony grew rapidly, and other competitors of Uhlig began setting up workshops and factories in the surrounding region. Besides the towns of Waldheim and Carlsfeld, mentioned above, Klingenthal, Johanngeorgenstadt and other villages sprouted free-reed industries. Beyond those early builders already mentioned were C. A. Wunderlich, in Siebenbrunn (1854); Ernst

Bässler, in Augustusburg (1860); C. Oswald Link, in Zwickau (1863); Karl Haimerl, in Bayern (1869); Reinhard Windisch, in Klingenthal (1870); Otto Weidlich, in Brunnödra (1873); Louis Oswald Herold, in Georgenthal (1883); Ernst Birnstock, in Crimmitschay (1886); Bruna Thiele, in Chemnitz (1890), Friedrich Wilhelm Meinel, in Vogtland (1906), and others.<sup>25</sup> It is difficult to reconstruct which of these companies exported one- to three-row German concertinas to England and elsewhere and which produced the much larger Chemnitz, Carlsfeld and Bandoneon concertinas preferred in Germanic and Slavik Europe, the U.S. Midwest, and Argentina. At very least, the smaller German concertinas were produced by Uhlig, Höselbarth, Pirner, Wunsch, Zimmerman, and Reichel.



Figure 24. Musical group, one of which is playing a relatively large, square-ended multi-voiced Chemnitz concertina of the type popular in Germany and with German and Czech immigrants in the United States in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. North Dakota, ca. 1880.

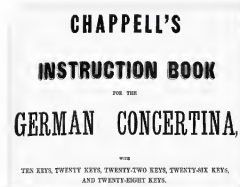


Figure 25. A portion of the cover page from another tutor by Carlo Minasi, published by Chappell & Co., London, 1858. Twenty-eight keyed German concertinas were fully chromatic and had three rows. These were the largest popular size imported into England; most were two-row, twenty key diatonic models. With thanks to Randall Merris.

German free reed construction peaked in the decades immediately preceding World War I. The two world wars destroyed not only the demand for German-made concertinas in England, Australasia and North America, but they destroyed many of the factories that produced these instruments as well. Heavily industrial Saxony was hit by Allied bombers in World War II, and after the war the Soviets collectivised those remnants not bombed. The Alfred Arnold Company, the successor to Uhlig's company, was forcibly dissolved by the Soviets in 1948. Some of its workers were collectivised with a Klingenthal group that was forced to concentrate on inexpensive accordions for the vast Russian market, and others turned to building parts for diesel motors.<sup>26</sup> The quality of remaining concertina production at the Klingenthal location plummeted. In recent years, a small company there has attempted to revive the trade.

### Adoption, production, and export

In nineteenth-century Germany, as in England and the United States, working-class people were drawn to lower cost free-reed musical alternatives to the rather expensive piano

and hand-made violin. These diatonic push-and-pull instruments were an excellent match for western European popular dance music of that era and were easy to learn, even for the illiterate. The portable, bellows-driven concertina and accordion initiated a new musical era where the working and emerging middle classes became just as likely to partake in home-made instrumental music as the aristocracy (Figure 26). In Germany the aristocracy shunned the various types of locally made diatonic concertinas, calling them *Volkinstrumente* (instruments of the common folk).<sup>27</sup> This was the same pattern experienced in England, where the wealthy typically embraced Wheatstone's handcrafted, fully chromatic English concertina and shunned the German concertina, which initially was introduced in England as a middle-class musical novelty. The German concertina rapidly became the instrument of choice with working class "folk."

Inexpensive German concertinas were available for sale in England as early as the mid-1840s,<sup>28</sup> and were exported to Ireland, United States, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa in large numbers by the early 1850s. The year 1852 seems to have seen the first mass importation in most of these countries.<sup>29</sup>



Figure 26. Postcard showing a German girl with a two row German concertina, ca. 1900. With thanks to *Concertina and Squeezebox Magazine*.

Although somewhat fragile and fairly unresponsive by modern standards, early German concertinas were inexpensive enough to be used by poor street musicians and were easy to learn for a population that was largely illiterate and untrained in formal music notation. A young boy who busked regularly on the London steamboats in 1856 recalled the popularity of these German instruments three years earlier, in 1853 (as recorded by Henry Mayhew, 1861<sup>30</sup>):

*I was about getting on for twelve when father first bought me a concertina. That instrument was very fashionable then, and everybody had it nearly. I had an accordion before; but... I didn't take a fancy to it somehow, although I could play a few tunes on it. . . . I liked the concertina, because it's like a full band. It's like having the fiddle and the harp together. . . . The concertina I use now cost me 16s. It's got twenty double keys—one when I pull the bellows out and one when I close it. I wear out an instrument in three months. The edges of the bellows get worn out: then I have to patch them up, till they get so weak that it mostly doubles over. It costs me about 1s. a week to have them kept in order. They get out of tune very soon. . . . The old instruments I sell to the boys, for about as much as I give for a new one. They are very dear; but I get them so cheap when I buy them, I only give 16s. for a 25s. instrument. I've got a beautiful instrument at home, and I give a pound for it, and it's worth two. Those I buy come from Germany, where they make them, and then they are took to this warehouse, where I buy them.*

The capabilities of these earliest German instruments for playing rapid-fire dance tunes were somewhat limited, as the young musician indicated:

*I don't know much operatic music, only one or two airs; but they're easier to play on the concertina than lively music, because it's difficult to move the fingers very quickly. You can't hardly play a hornpipe. It makes the arm ache before you can play it all through, and it makes*

*such a row with the valve working the bellows up and down, that it spoils the music.*<sup>31</sup>

These square-ended early German concertinas were widely available in nearby Scotland, where Sir John Everett Millais (1829–1896) painted *The Blind Girl* in 1856 (Figure 27). The blind girl is said to be begging with her German concertina, underscoring that its use had already extended to poorer parts of Scottish society at the time, just as it had to the English boy working on the London steamboats.<sup>32</sup>



Figure 27. Sir John Everett Millais (1829–1896) painted *The Blind Girl* in Scotland in 1856. That painting depicts the square-ended Uhlig-style instrument available at that time. From an old print.

Price was a large factor in times that were hardly prosperous anywhere in western Europe. German free-reed instruments were among the first consumer products of factory mass production, and prices dropped dramatically as competition grew. From the beginning, German

producers favored division of labor and mass production in their workshops, which quickly grew into large factories (Figure 28). Prices fell to as low as 2s 3d (two shillings and three pence) for a German concertina in London in 1878 (Figure 29a). That sales price is equivalent to about £ 44 in current UK currency.<sup>33</sup>

The trade clearly supported such a proliferation of factories: by 1876, it was estimated that annual concertina and accordion production in Germany and Austria had reached 400,000 instruments,<sup>34</sup> approximately 70 percent of which were built for export (about 300,000 instruments). With a good helping of inference, we can estimate a “ballpark” figure of about 50,000 German concertinas arriving in Britain by that year. The logic for this rough estimate is as follows. It seems reasonable to assume that the British Empire (including its colonies), with about forty million residents of European ancestry in 1876, and the United States, with a population of about forty-seven million persons in 1876, would together have accounted for perhaps two thirds of German-made exports—thus about 200,000 instruments per year. If the British Empire and the United States each received half, based on roughly equivalent population, then each would have received about 100,000 German instruments in 1876. In the 1870s, advertisements indicate that concertinas

and button accordions were roughly at parity in popularity (in earlier decades, concertinas had the edge, and later in the nineteenth century, accordions were more plentiful). Assuming such parity, we can estimate that about 50,000 German concertinas may have been imported into Britain and its colonies in the year 1876, for sales to its citizens at home and abroad.

Although customs and import records are scant, available data reinforce the reasonableness of that estimate. United States Customs records for fiscal year 1900 (a year that was on the waning side of the nineteenth-century free-reed boom) lists 94,500 imported “concertinas and accordions” from Germany.<sup>35</sup> South Africa, then a British colony, imported 97,315 German musical instruments in 1902, many of them concertinas (see Chapter 5).<sup>36</sup> Finally, period advertisements show massive amounts of these instruments for sale in large “Concertina and Accordion Warehouses” in England, such as the one depicted in an 1887 Manchester ad, touting an in-house inventory of “5000 concertinas” (Figure 29b).

A photograph taken in the late nineteenth century of the shop front of Campbell and Company of Glasgow, one such mass retailer, (Figure 30) shows German concertinas as well as other mass-produced musical instruments. The German concertina is highlighted in the inset.



Figure 28. Advertisement for the Meinel Concertina and Accordion Factory, Klingenthal Germany, ca. 1906. German concertinas were typically built in large factories, which kept prices low. From LaVerne Rippley, *The Chemnitz Concertina, a History and an Accolade*, 2006.



**FOR CHEAP CONCERTINAS,**  
 'RICHARDSON'S, 109, Old-street, St. Luke's, London. 20-  
 Keyed Concertinas, 1s. 3d.; Organ Concertina, 4s; Anglo-Concertinas,  
 6s. 6d. Noted the cheapest house in the trade. Price-Liste post-free.

**5000 CONCERTINAS, at 2s. 6d.,**  
 2s., 3s. 6d., 4s., 4s. 6d.: Steel Reeds, 9s. 6d.  
 Melodions, at 4s. 9d.; Double Bellows, 5s. 9d., 6s. 9d.,  
 7s. 9d., 8s. 9d.; Steel Reeds, 1s. 6d. Carriage paid.  
 Every instrument warranted.—E. THORNHILL and  
 SONS, 65, Exchange-arcade, Manchester.

Figure 29. Two advertisements for German concertinas, both from the *Penny Illustrated*, London.

A) at top: an advertisement touting 'Cheap' German concertinas, from Dec. 14, 1878. Price was a major selling point for German-made instruments, when compared with English-made ones. The advertisement also mentions English-made Anglo-German concertinas, here with the first known occurrence of the abbreviated term *Anglo-Concertina*. Whereas German-made concertinas were selling for 2s 3d, the Anglo-German models carried a premium price of 6s 6d.

B) at bottom: This advertisement from the October 22, 1887 issue shows the enormous inventories of inexpensive concertinas carried at low prices by English musical 'warehouses', this one located in Manchester.

Figure 30. Campbell and Company storefront, Glasgow, late nineteenth century. Note German concertina in window (inset), with two other concertinas behind it. From the collection of Stephen Chambers.



## Development of the Anglo-German Concertina

Vast quantities of imported free-reed instruments, readily available at attractively low prices: modern global consumer culture had seemingly reached Great Britain by the late nineteenth century. Those low prices allowed tens of thousands of working class people to buy a free-reed instrument at a time when the handcrafted English concertina would have been far beyond their financial reach. The German concertina's exceedingly simple keyboard had earned it many sales as well. However, middle class concertina players who tried both the elegant, handcrafted English concertina of Charles Wheatstone and its brash but humble German counterpart gave low marks to the quality and response of the imported German concertinas, even as they favored the simple German keyboard.

Several factors unfavorably affected the performance of German concertinas relative to English system instruments. German concertinas used reeds arranged in tandem in shared, stamped brass or zinc reed plates instead of the individually crafted steel or brass reeds riveted into individual metal shoes that were used in the English system concertina. German concertinas employed wooden levers and actions instead of the metal levers and actions of the English concertina, and cardboard instead of leather bellows. Middle-class aficionados of the German keyboard began to ask English producers if they could make a quality English-made concertina with a German keyboard. Three makers of English concertinas began producing concertinas with the popular German keyboard in the 1850s. These were soon called "Anglo-German" concertinas, the hyphen indicating this shared origin.

### The early makers

**George Jones.** George Jones (1832-1919; see Figure 31) worked for and with Jabez Austin from about 1844, when Jones was twelve years old. Austin supplied parts for Wheatstone's

English concertina business and later for English concertina maker Joseph Scates. During this period, Jones became acquainted with the new German concertina and performed with it in the London music halls:

*[H]aving a good voice [I] took engagements at Music Halls and came out as a vocal and instrumental artist. The German Concertina came out, and I purchased one and soon was able to master it and I claim to be the first to introduce it to the public. . . . I was on the Music Hall stage, this I continued until I was 19 years of age (about 1850).<sup>37</sup>*

Jones began to repair German concertinas on his own time. Austin and Jones seem to have parted company briefly in 1850, and Jones worked for a short while for John Nickolds (described later). Jones and Austin soon rejoined, however, when Austin moved his shop to a location off Commercial Road in east London (Figure 32). Jones became shop supervisor and instructor.



Figure 31. George Jones, with one of his English concertinas. From his autobiographical *Recollections of the English Concertina Trade from 1844*, available online at The Concertina Library, [www.concertina.com](http://www.concertina.com).

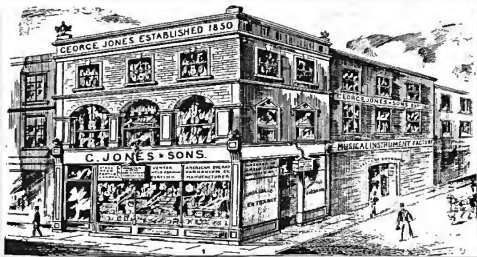


Figure 32. George Jones' premises at 3, Crombie Row at Commercial Road, London, ca 1890. From Frank Butler's biography of George Jones, *Concertina & Squeezebox*, no. 20.

Jones made a 22-key Anglo-German instrument as early as 1851, for his own use, and built one with 26 keys in 1854.<sup>38</sup> He claimed to be the first to build an Anglo-German concertina (the 22-key).<sup>39</sup> When Austin died in 1857, Jones took sole ownership of the company, and only after this time started to manufacture concertinas under his own name.<sup>40</sup> During this time period,

*I engaged Mr. Shaller a toolmaker of whom I have spoken of to make the tools for the production of metal work and started to make at first the Anglo-German Concertina in which I was immediately successful. Sent the first one to Mr. Scates in Dublin, who gave me a large order.<sup>41</sup>*

A disastrous fire in 1862 destroyed his original shop at Commercial Road.<sup>42</sup>

George Jones had a colorful marketing life. He bartered instruments with sailors who came to his shop from the nearby wharves, and he also provided instruments under contract to the Salvation Army. His grandson, Frank Butler, reported that he would wear Salvation Army garb to help ensure success in landing those accounts.

In later years he operated a reasonably large musical instrument factory, which also made banjos and sold brass band instruments. Two examples of Jones' early Anglo concertinas are shown in Figure 33.

**John Nickolds and John Crabb.** John Nickolds (1787-1862) along with his sons Thomas and Charles were hired by Wheatstone's concertina company in 1847 as machinists, initially engaged to make the tiny screws that clamp the reed tongues into the reed frame. Louis Lachenal, a Swiss immigrant of considerable skill, soon displaced Nickolds and his sons in that task, and by 1848 the Nickolds men had set up their own concertina shop in London. John Crabb, who worked for Lachenal in the 1850s, joined Nickolds at some time after 1858.<sup>43</sup> A surviving trade card, likely dates from about 1860:

Nickolds, Crabb and Co.  
Manufacturers of the Improved English Concertina,  
And Inventors of the Anglo-German,  
Established 1848, Late of Messrs Wheatstone & Co  
5 Woodbridge St., Clerkenwell<sup>44</sup>



Figure 33. Four early Anglo-German concertinas. Clockwise from upper left: Nickolds Crabb and Sons, circa early 1850s; Lachenal, ca 1862-1867; Jones, late 1850s; Jones made for Simpson, 1860s. All are from the collection of Stephen Chambers.



Figure 34. Rock Chidley's concertina and harmonium factory (above) and his concertina salesroom (upper right), London, ca. 1860. The salesroom was at 135 High Holborn. Chidley had factories at both Hollingsworth Road North and at Wellington Street, Victoria Road; it is not known which is pictured here. With thanks to Andy Ward (Chidley's Great Great Grandson) and Chris Flint.

Some have interpreted this card as evidence that Nickolds invented the Anglo-German instrument by 1848, but that date is perhaps better interpreted as the date of founding of their joint company. It seems clear, however, that they were producing two-row Anglo-German concertinas by the early 1850s.<sup>45</sup> Figure 33 shows an early example.

**Rock Chidley.** Rock Chidley was probably not the first among these three to produce an English-made German system concertina, but he has left us with a clearly stated reason why these English concertina makers began to try their hand with the German keyboard. As he commented in his tutor for his “Improved German Fingering Concertina” in 1858,

*The German Concertina is an Instrument coming into use to a great extent on account of its portability, sweetness of tone, power of execution and facility with which it is learned by those unacquainted with music. The improved German Fingering Concertina is an Instrument of the same fingering, which I have been induced to make in consequence of repeated applications from Persons who have had foreign made ones and wishing to have something superior. These instruments [are] being made by English workmen under the superintendence of R.C., and the same description of work and materials being used in the regular Concertina. . . .*<sup>46</sup>

Chidley and his brother Edward worked for Wheatstone’s firm from about 1843. Rock was a “finisher” who assembled the internal parts made by others. According to Harry Crabb, the brothers were relatives of Charles and William Wheatstone, possibly the Wheatstone brothers’ nephews. By 1851, Rock had struck out on his own, opening a shop on 135 High Holburn in London (Figure 34).<sup>47</sup> He exhibited his English system concertinas in a booth at the Great Exhibition of 1851 and was producing Anglo-German concertinas by at least 1858 (Figure 35), at first calling them “German Fingering Concertinas” in his advertisements. Although his firm was bankrupted in 1862, London city

directories listed him as a concertina maker until 1886.<sup>48</sup>

Meanwhile, Rock’s brother Edward Chidley became an independent producer of concertinas and harmoniums, supplying Wheatstone’s firm with concertinas by 1865. He took over the reins of Wheatstone’s firm around 1870, and Edward’s son (also Edward) took over in turn upon his father’s death in 1899. Edward Senior’s grandson Kenneth Vernon Chidley entered the business in 1906 and managed Wheatstone’s production by 1924.

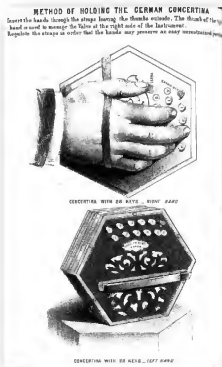


Figure 35. Rock Chidley 22-keyed Anglo-German Concertina (see label, lower illustration). From *Chappell's Instruction Book for the German Concertino*, London, 1858.

In summary, it appears that either George Jones or Nickolds, Crabb and Company built the first “Anglo-German” instrument, probably during or near the year 1851.<sup>49</sup> By 1854, these

instruments were readily available and the term *Anglo-German concertina* fully established, as the two advertisements shown in Figure 36 demonstrate.

**ANGLO-GERMAN CONCERTINA OF ENGLISH CONCERTINA**, with German fingering.—Three match required instruments are now to be had with 32 keys (44 notes), tuned accurately in key of C, in mahogany case complete, price £8 8s. of FRANKSON and SON, 35, Bishopsgate-within.—Made any pitch to order.

**RECREATION for LEISURE HOURS.**  
SIMPSON'S newly-invented **ANGLO-GERMAN CONCERTINA** has a deep rich tone, superior workmanship, and exactly the same fingering as the German concertina now made and sold by Simpson's easy and cheap method of playing it. This instrument far surpasses the German concertina, and the price is still cheap for such a superior instrument.—*etc.* Manufactured by J. SIMPSON, 265, Bishopsgate, where may be had German concertinas, from 1s. 6d. to 5s., and his well-known easy method of playing, and books of songs, 6d. each.

Figure 36. Early Anglo-German concertina advertisements. The upper one is from the *Daily News*, London, June 16, 1854; the second advertisement is from *The Times*, London, June 28, 1854. George Jones is known to have made concertinas for Simpson, the vendor in the second advertisement. Note the statements regarding its superiority over the German concertina, which it was intended to supplant.

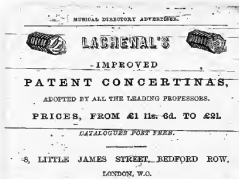
### Other significant Victorian makers

**Louis Lachenal** (ca. 1821-1861) immigrated to London from Switzerland in 1839 and was listed on his English immigration form as a watchmaker. He was working for Wheatstone's firm by at least 1844, making screws. By 1846, he worked in a supervisory role within the shop, and by 1848 had displaced John Nickolds and his sons at tool making. Lachenal made a series of improvements in design and production methods that allowed production to rapidly increase, and as a result Wheatstone introduced a new, revolutionary "mass produced" model in 1848. Lachenal apparently owned his own tools and hired his own employees, producing English system concertinas on contract to Wheatstone. By 1858, this contract had probably run its term, and Lachenal opened his own business. Production at Wheatstone dropped precipitously, as production followed Lachenal to his new shop. When Louis Lachenal died in 1861, his firm, by

then well established, continued under the management of his widow, Elisabeth Lachenal.<sup>50</sup>

The first indication of Anglo-German concertina production at Lachenal's firm appears in an advertisement of 1863, where an image of a two-row Anglo-German instrument is prominently featured (Figure 37).<sup>51</sup> The price, £1.11.6, was quite high relative to German imports, but then so was the quality. Prices dropped steadily for these models, reaching as low as 20s in London for a low-end, two-row Lachenal with mahogany ends in 1895. An early example is shown in Figure 33.

Lachenal's applied its new "mass production" techniques to Anglo-German production and from the beginning, Anglo-German models significantly outsold that company's English system models (see below). During peak production years in the last decades of the nineteenth century, Lachenal models were imported by the case as far afield as Australia. Brisbane shipping notices of September 19, 1877 noted that the *Ex Windsor Castle*, a ship from London, carried among many other things "two cases Lachnell's [*sic*] Anglo-German concertinas."<sup>52</sup> By 1895, 20-key Lachenal Anglo-German concertinas were available in Brisbane for 35s.<sup>53</sup> The last decades of the 1800s were the most successful for the firm. Production declined in the early twentieth century, and the firm closed in the early 1930s.



MUSICAL DIRECTORY ADVERTISER

**LACHENAL'S**

—IMPROVED—

**PATENT CONCERTINAS,**

ADOPTED BY ALL THE LEADING PROFESSORS.

PRICES, FROM £1 11s. 6d. TO £21

CATALOGUES POST FREE.

8, LITTLE JAMES STREET, BEDFORD ROW,  
LONDON, W.O.

Figure 37. Advertisement for Lachenal's concertinas, including an Anglo-German model. From *The Musical Directory Advertiser* (London) of 1863. With thanks to Stephen Chambers.

**Charles Jeffries.** Charles Jeffries (1841-1906) was, like his father, an itinerant brushmaker. According to Harry Crabb, in a 1970 interview,

*Charlie Jeffries was a tinker, in the 1870s, who used to go round with a barrow mending pots and pans. When he didn't get any tinkers' work, he used to busk on the concertina: People would say "we like that, can you get us one made?"—so that's how he got started.*

By 1861, Jeffries (Figure 38) was listed as a "musician" in the census, and by 1866 he was listed as a "musical instrument mender." In 1869, this changed to "musical instrument maker."<sup>54</sup>

Tommy Williams, a former Lachenal employee who knew Jeffries, said that

*Charlie Jeffries—he used to be a tinker—had never been taught anything. Most extraordinary, as he turned out the finest Anglos, an instrument that no other maker could equal. He used the hardest steel, and very solid construction. It was Henry Crabb's father (John Crabb) who made them for Jeffries—he done the woodwork—but later on, the first Charlie Jeffries became independent.*

Jeffries later brought his sons—Charles Junior, William, George, and Thomas—into the business. The eldest, Charles Junior (1862-1953) was on board at least by 1874.<sup>55</sup>

Production at Jeffries' firm (later to become known as Jeffries Brothers) continued throughout the 1920s. They apparently did not engage in print advertising, so there are no surviving early advertisements or price lists. The earliest example of Jeffries' instruments is a 26-key wooden-ended model of 1874 in the Neil Wayne collection at the Horniman Museum, London. Internal markings state "Made by Charles Jeffries 1874," and "Made by C. Jeffries father 1874" on the reed pan (Figure 39). Jeffries concentrated from the beginning on three-row instruments that were fully or nearly fully chromatic. Another very early Jeffries instrument in the Wayne collection has 42-keys (plus air button).<sup>56</sup>

Another somewhat later Jeffries concertina of nearly that size is shown in Figure 40. Of all vintage concertinas available today, Jeffries concertinas command the highest esteem and price.



Figure 38. Charles Jeffries (1841–1906), with thanks to his granddaughter, Mrs. Pearl Pierce, in Chris Algar and others, 2005, *Charles Jeffries, the Man and His Family*: [www.concertina.com](http://www.concertina.com).



Figure 39. Concertina by Charles Jeffries, 1874. It has wooden ends and 26 keys plus air button. Photo courtesy of the Horniman Museum, London.



Figure 40. Thirty eight button Bh/F Jeffries Anglo-German concertina, once owned by Fred Kilroy. With thanks to Roger Digby.

**Wheatstone & Company**, the premier builder of English concertinas, were apparently not prominent in nineteenth-century Anglo-German concertina production, and they began significant Anglo production only in the early twentieth century. From 1910 to 1937, company ledgers show that they sold 1,888 Anglo-German concertinas, the vast majority of which had thirty to forty keys.<sup>57</sup> Company ledgers dated 1892 and earlier show no significant Anglo production, and there is a gap in ledgers for production between 1892 and 1910.<sup>58</sup> Regardless of their late start, their Linota Anglo-German model (Figure 41) was known for its high quality of construction.

**Stanley Concertinas:** Another late nineteenth-century builder was located in Australia. John Stanley (ca. 1834-1913), the “Concertina Doctor” of Bathurst, New South Wales, had a concertina repair business in his home by the late 1860s, with a large sign reading “J Stanley-Concertina Doctor.” Repairs soon led to construction. Stanley imported some parts from Lachenal’s, in England, and made others locally. He built both English and Anglo-German concertinas, but the latter were reportedly by far the most popular; these sold for £2 10s in the 1870s.<sup>59</sup> Chapter 7 contains more information on his business.



Figure 41. Wheatstone Duet and Anglo pricelist, 1910. The concertina on the right is a ‘Linota’ Anglo. With thanks to Chris Algar and the Concertina Library.



## **Production, Marketing, and Naming of German and Anglo-German Instruments**

Precise concertina production data (serial numbers, dates of manufacture, etc.) for most English makers is nearly as scarce as it is for German makers, but for a few makers data is available or reasonable measurements or estimates can be made. Production data from the Wheatstone & Company original ledgers are now digitally available, thanks to the work of researchers Margaret Birley, Robert Gaskins, and Wes Williams.<sup>60</sup> For more than a decade, Chris Algar and Randall Merris have been collecting serial numbers, descriptions and sales information for all systems of Lachenal concertinas.<sup>61</sup> Their database was used in the estimation of the Lachenal company's production by decade that is presented here; it is anticipated that a more authoritative and complete compilation of their findings will be available in coming years. Finally, an estimate of numbers of concertinas made by all English makers for the year 1876 appears in a period trade report. This same report contained a similar estimate for German concertina production that year, cited above. This section seeks to summarize, analyze, and extrapolate this data to estimate approximate levels of production of English-made "Anglo-German" concertinas in Victorian and Edwardian time. These data illustrate the thorough dominance in numbers of German and Anglo-German concertinas sold in England over all other concertina systems throughout the Victorian era.

### **English production of Anglo-German concertinas**

**C. Wheatstone & Company.** The most complete production information of all of the nineteenth-century English makers is that from C. Wheatstone & Company. Basic data from the recently published Wheatstone company ledgers was collated, then "cleaned" by removing duplicates and assigning all serial numbers to their earliest appearance in the ledger. The resulting information was compiled by year, as

shown in Figure 42, which shows the total numbers of instruments produced per year. In the period of time covered by this plot, virtually all instruments built by Wheatstone were English system concertinas; a limited amount of duct and Anglo production began only in the early 1900s. Data are fairly complete, except for a three-year period from 1848-1850, for which ledgers are missing; production for those years is estimated (light gray). Ledger data are also missing for the period from 1892-1910 (not shown), leading to some uncertainty as to the date of initial Anglo production at that firm.

This chart shows a striking and early peak in this company's production. Modest annual growth in production appears in the years before 1848, as the company developed its production methods. By 1847, the company had reached about one hundred sixty instruments per year—small numbers indeed. As discussed previously, when Louis Lachenal introduced mass production techniques to the company in the 1850s, production skyrocketed, to about eight hundred instruments per year. This rate of production continued until about 1858, when production began to precipitously fall. Louis Lachenal, responsible by then for most if not all of the Wheatstone company's concertina production, had been building these instruments on contract for Wheatstone at his own shops; he apparently owned the tools and subcontracted the workers. In 1858, he either terminated his contract with Wheatstone, or the contract had run its course; thus the steep drop in Wheatstone production in subsequent years. Concertina sales over the next several years seem to have consisted primarily of disposal of current inventories.

The situation within Wheatstone may have been dire, especially after its head, William Wheatstone (brother of Sir Charles), died in 1862. The company's primary interest may also have shifted from concertinas to harmoniums, as during this period the fashionable upper crust began to set aside English concertinas—when cheap German concertinas became popular with the working class.<sup>62</sup> Edward Chidley, who had worked at Wheatstone for two decades, assumed

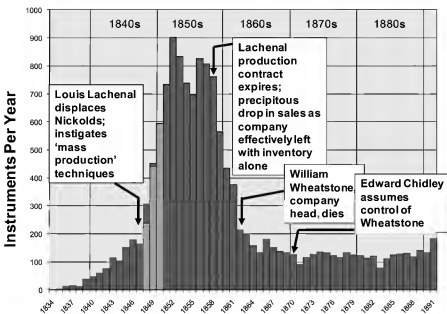


Figure 42. Wheatstone English system concertina production, by year. Reconstructed from the Wheatstone Ledgers. The more lightly shaded areas represent estimates in years where ledgers are missing (1848-1850).

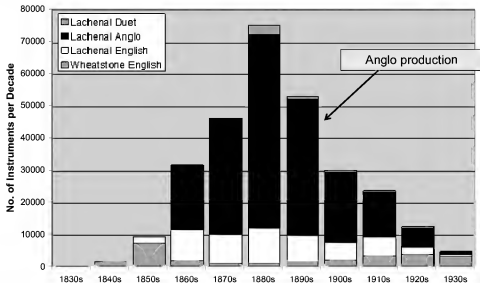


Figure 43. Estimated Wheatstone and Lachenal production by decade, 1830s-1930s. See text for discussion of methodology. This chart is based upon analysis of data from Wheatstone ledgers and from unpublished Lachenal serial numbers that were collected by Randall Merris and Chris Algar. Note: part of the slowly growing Wheatstone production in 1900s-1930s consists of then-added duet and Anglo production.

control of the firm in 1870. For whatever reason, the firm never again recovered to its peak production levels of the 1850s, and for the rest of the century limped along at about 120 English system concertinas per year. Why, one may ask, did it not regrow and renew itself? For one thing, Edward Chidley preferred the construction of harmoniums, increasingly popular at the time.<sup>63</sup> For a more complete explanation, however, we must look at the growth of the company started by the talented engineer who left Wheatstone just before their fall—Louis Lachenal—and then look at the effect of growing competition within the English marketplace presented by the new English-made Anglo-German concertinas.

**Lachenal and Company.** Data for construction and sales of Lachenal concertinas are much less complete than those for Wheatstone, as no company ledgers have survived. However, available preliminary compilation of serial numbers and sales dates by Merris and Algar suggests that serial numbers were assigned in an orderly and linear fashion as they were built. From these data, annual production statistics can tentatively be estimated. Perhaps 56,000 English system concertinas and about 5,000 duet concertinas were built from the company's inception in 1858 to its demise in the 1930s. This is an impressive figure, but similar serial number data show that that firm built approximately 200,000 Anglo-German concertinas during the same period, comprising a three and one-half to one edge for Uhlig's German keyboard system over the English system. A caveat should be entered at this point: these numbers are all *maximum* construction numbers, as there is always the probability that some serial numbers never became actual finished instruments. However, available serial number data from specific surviving instruments, though statistically a small portion of all instruments built, show no large gaps that would indicate potential for significant overestimation.

Available serial numbers have been plotted against sales date, where such data was available, for each of the three main systems (English, Anglo-German, and Duet). From those plots, best-fit annual sales figures were derived, and a

best-estimate plot of production per decade was constructed.<sup>64</sup> Only the summary plot is shown in Figure 43, and it should be considered a tentative case, pending completion of Merris and Algar's compilation. The total of the instruments in all columns match the figures of total instruments produced, cited above.

In this plot, the bottom layer, in light gray, shows Wheatstone production; it reflects the same production figures shown in Figure 42, but by decade rather than by year. All-time peak Wheatstone production was in the decade of the 1850s, as has been discussed. In later years (1890s and later) there is only a modest regrowth of production that reflects the addition of relatively small numbers of Wheatstone duet and Anglo instruments introduced in the early 1900s. In this chart, these latter instruments were not separated from the English system instruments that represented the majority of the firm's output in those years.

The next layer, in white, shows the production of English system concertinas by the Lachenal company during this time (Figure 43). The low amount in the 1850s represents those instruments constructed after Lachenal's departure in 1858. The column for the 1860s answers the question of whether demand for English concertinas had evaporated after the 1850s, when Wheatstone's output dropped so precipitously: it had not. In effect, production simply moved from Wheatstone's ledger to Lachenal's. The data clearly shows, however, that demand and sales for English system concertinas for the combined Wheatstone and Lachenal firms (the bottom two layers taken together) were all but flat from the 1850s through the 1890s, at about one thousand instruments per year. Other makers of English system concertinas had either small or relatively short-lived production with the exception of George Jones, for whom no production data is available. It seems safe to assume that English system concertina production in England was essentially flat for all of late Victorian time.

The real growth in Lachenal's firm was in the sale of Anglo-German instruments, as can readily be seen (the black layer on the chart).

Anglo-German sales had begun there by about 1863 and continued for the life of the firm. As we shall see below, this rise in Anglo-German production quite closely parallels the pattern of increase in plots for numbers of Anglo-German tutors introduced and for numbers of observations ("sightings") of German and Anglo-German instruments in period newspapers, journals and books. The period from 1860 through World War I was clearly the heyday for the production of Anglo-German instruments in England.

An observation of the total number of concertinas of all keyboard systems built by English versus German workers in 1876 was published in a period volume entitled *British Manufacturing Industries*, allowing some perspective on English versus German concertina production at that time.<sup>65</sup> This volume reports that concertina production in England that year, for all systems, totaled 5000 instruments in a year when German production of bellows-driven free reeds (concertinas and accordions) reportedly reached 400,000 instruments. As discussed above, we estimate that about one-eighth of those instruments built in Germany, or 50,000, could be expected to have been concertinas exported to Britain (along with an approximately equal number of accordions). These cheap imports were arriving in floods that seem to have outnumbered domestic English production by a factor of ten to one. Period photographs and accounts, discussed below, support that estimated relative difference in usage.

Of the roughly five thousand instruments produced in England in 1876, one hundred twenty-two were Wheatstone English concertinas and, from the foregoing discussion, some nine hundred were Lachenal English system instruments, along with over three thousand Lachenal Anglo-German instruments. The remaining one thousand or so instruments would include those made by Jones, Crabb, Jeffries, and smaller makers. Among these other makers most of the instruments produced would have been Anglo-German models, just as was the case at Lachenal. Such a wide disparity between English concertina construction and Anglo concertina

production remains the case at the present time: the bulk of new concertinas built worldwide is by far of the German and Anglo-German variety. Even among English makers alone, then and now, the lion's share have consistently been Anglo-German concertinas.

### The German system dominates and finds its market niche

The aforementioned production data for the year 1876 is summarized in a pie chart, Figure 44. It shows estimated combined imports and production of Anglo-German (black), German (gray), and English system concertinas (white and light gray) for 1876. Even accounting for substantial potential error in the estimate of German imports, the dominance of the German keyboard system, used in both the German and Anglo-German models, is clear: it had become the popular choice. This thorough dominance of the German fingering system over the English system, and the even more thorough dominance of German imports over better quality but more costly English-made instruments, may at first seem a bit over-drawn. Consider, however, the demography of social classes in Victorian England (Figure 45) and the potential alignment of these concertinas with those classes.

For clarity, class-related terms used in this book are defined according to the definitions and percentage estimates of the various classes used in Sally Mitchell's *Daily Life in Victorian England* (1996).<sup>66</sup> The *working class* in Victorian England consisted of those who did manual labor—that is, farm workers, domestic servants, and factory workers. Most of these workers earned barely enough to stay alive. This group (depicted in gray in Figure 45) contained well over three quarters of the English population. A *middle class* (in black) consisted of some 20 percent of England's population by the 1870s, and consisted of an upper middle class of professionals (bankers, clergy, government service, etc.) and a lower middle class of shopkeepers, clerical workers, and some farm owners. These middle-class groups had an extremely wide range of incomes. Finally, there

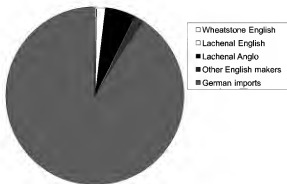


Figure 44. Estimated English production as well as imports from Germany of concertinas in 1876. See text for explanation for data sources and estimates.

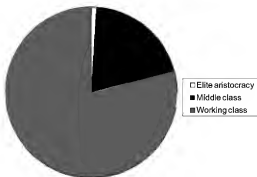


Figure 45. Class structure, mid-Victorian England, as a percentage of population. Estimates are from Mitchell, *Daily Life in Victorian England*, 1996. See text for definitions and discussion.

was at the top a tiny group of *elite aristocracy*—landed gentry with inherited estates and titles (shown in white). This group consisted of perhaps less than a thousand extended families, representing less than one percent of the population, but with astronomically high incomes relative to the vast bulk of the population.

Relative proportions of concertinas of various types and systems seem to reflect the relative sizes of the various social strata; in other

words, the concertina market expanded to fit available demographic niches. At the top end of the market, the English system was strongly aligned in early Victorian times to the aristocracy and hence its producers were tightly constricted in their ability to grow production. It was only late in the century when these instruments reached others lower in the social pecking order, as secondhand instruments. Until that time, annual production appears to have been flat.

At the lower end, the largest demographic group and potential market by far consisted of working class “folk.” They had little disposable income, but an unquenchable thirst for entertainment. The mass-produced, inexpensive German concertina squarely targeted this group, in very large numbers. Much Victorian humor was based upon the instrument’s popularity with them (Figure 46).

The middle class was growing rapidly and had visions of upward mobility. This group has been estimated as consisting of 15 percent of the total population in 1837, and 25 percent in 1901.<sup>67</sup> They played predominantly German and Anglo-German instruments. At first introduction, German concertinas were novelties of this middle class, and were sold by toy importers like Kleyser & Tritschler of London.<sup>68</sup> Music publishers of Anglo-German and German tutors targeted this middle class throughout the Victorian era, with dance music and song collections depicting the instruments in solidly middle-class settings (Figure 47), as Stuart Eydmann has observed.<sup>69</sup> At its lower end, this class included the most successful of the street buskers, who would naturally prefer the best instrument that they could afford for their craft—typically an Anglo-German concertina. A fair amount of specific information on the incomes of

street buskers who played Anglo concertinas, gleaned from Victorian court proceedings involving marital separations (see Chapter 2), indicates that the best of them were well able to afford Anglo-German instruments for their occupation. Both German and Anglo-German concertinas were popular props for portrait photographers, attesting to the popularity and middle-class status of the instruments at the time (Figures 48 and 49).

These market niches were hardly static, however, and producers tried to expand into each other's market share. The first to respond to the popularity of the German system was Charles Wheatstone himself. He produced a "Duette" concertina in 1844 that was largely diatonic, had a square body, and had 24 keys oriented across the instrument, rather than the vertical orientation of keys in his English system keyboard. As Wheatstone expert Neil Wayne observed:

*The design of the Wheatstone "Duette" was probably based on the German concertina first patented by Uhlig in the late 1820s. Wheatstone used a similar rectangular body and simple brass levers with integral brass-capped buttons, stamped with their note-names, in common with the design of the earliest German "press-draw" diatonic 10 and 20 key concertinas, and fitted his version with leather hand-straps on raised metal hand-bars. Internally, there is a simple rectilinear reed pan occupying the lower half of the bellows frame only, a design feature which is also similar to the early German concertinas. The factory records of the time describe the instrument as a "Duette" and sales were poor.<sup>70</sup>*

Wheatstone's price relative to that of the cheap imports was no doubt a factor in poor sales, and production was suspended. In the 1880s, Professor John Maccann later built upon Wheatstone's duette keyboard ideas with his Maccann duet system.

Just as English manufacturers pinched the keyboard design of the German system with their Anglo-German models—thus improving greatly upon quality and raising upper end prices—German makers had a response. German instruments began to sport the hexagonal shape of the Anglo-German instruments, as discussed above, and some went even further. By copying the fretwork designs of early Jones and other English makers (Figure 50), they could mimic higher quality Anglo-German instruments, thus undercutting Anglo-German prices.

English merchants could also play that game. Henry Harley, a London dealer, sold imported square-ended German-fingering system boxes, some of which were superficially altered to make them resemble English-made instruments, no doubt with a corresponding premium in price. As Stephen Chambers observed:



*Landlady.*—"Beg pardon, sir, but did I understand as you were a doctor of music?"  
*Musician.*—"I am, ma'am, why?"  
*Landlady.*—"Well sir, my Billy 'ave just been and broke 'is concertina, and I thought as 'ow I shud be glad to put a hold job in yer way."

Figure 46. A cartoon poking gentle fun at the working class concertina player. From the English magazine *Punch*, Nov. 20, 1900.



Figure 47. Two song collections for the German system concertina that targeted middle class buyers, ca. 1860s and 1870s, respectively. From the Neil Wayne collection at the Horniman Museum, London.

Harley seems to have modified *German concertinas* to give them a more “English” appearance. This “Anglo-icisation” ... usually involved cutting out the areas of the end that had a pattern of holes drilled in them, German-style, and replacing them with fresh timber in which fretwork was cut, English-style. The ends were then sanded down (which tended to also obscure the numbers of the buttons stamped into them, German-style) and ebonised (to hide what had been done). The German woodscrews in the ends were replaced with endbolts, and they were given leather bellows. He also added some extra notes, with smaller buttons, to them.<sup>71</sup>

Some later examples of Harley's instruments appear to have German-made fretwork. The trade was clearly a lively place.

The phenomenal growth in usage of both inexpensive German concertinas and their middlebrow Anglo-German cousins clearly cut into the market of the domestic makers of English system instruments. George Case of London was a prominent performer on the English system concertina who also marketed English system concertinas. It is uncertain whether the instruments he sold were of his own make or were simply Wheatstone instruments marked with his own brand. Caught between competition with Wheatstone for the flat demand in the upper end of the market and the phenomenal rise in popularity of German system instruments with the middle class on the lower end, he lowered prices to try to remain afloat. The attached advertisement of 1855 (Figure 51) shows quite poignantly his predicament: in it he complains quite bitterly about the competition from German instruments at the lower end of the price scale (he does not mention the new Anglo-German instruments). By the following year he apparently had had enough, and he sold out to Boosey & Sons.<sup>72</sup>



Figure 48. Portraits of four Victorians with German concertinas. England, 1850s-1870s. From the collection of Stephen Chambers.



Figure 49. Three portraits (bottom) of Victorians with Anglo-German concertinas. England, ca. 1870s-1880s. The instrument in the photograph on the right is a Jeffries, as prized then as today. From the collection of Stephen Chambers.







Figure 50. Two early Anglo-German models and a German imitation. Upper left: Nickolds, Crahh and Sons, early 1850s. Lower left: Jones made for Simpson, 1850s. Right center: German copy, likely made for juveniles. Note the close similarity in fretwork amongst all three models. From the collection of Stephen Chambers.

### Popularity of German and Anglo-German concertinas, as seen in period “sightings” and tutors

The popularity of German and Anglo-German concertinas can also be measured by counting the occurrences of “sightings” in period literature, as collected from digital English language newspapers, journals and books, as well as from period tutors. These data corroborate production figures in outlining the heyday of the instruments. Such digital databases are growing exponentially at the present time. Databases used in this report were collected during late 2007-early 2008 and allow a good summary view of trends in concertina

use. “Sightings” include passages in printed text (not including advertisements or tutors) where a German or Anglo-German concertina was mentioned, where that sighting could be assigned to type of activity, time and place.

Figure 52 illustrates a first cut of the retrieved data, showing only the total numbers of “sightings” in England or on British ships of German keyboard system instruments (German and Anglo-German concertinas) by decade. The text in the upper right portion of Figure 52 enumerates the digital data sources used. The data show a bell-shaped distribution of sightings that very closely resembles the distribution of the production of instruments by the Wheatstone and Lachenal firms over the same time period (Figure 43). Both demonstrate that significant usage of concertinas occurred between 1860 and 1920, with a peak in the last two decades of the nineteenth century—the “heyday” of the Anglo-family instrument in England.

A chart showing numbers of tutors published by decade for German system instruments (Figure 53) tells a similar story. The data in the chart come from a single resource: Randall Merris’ exhaustive 2003 bibliography of the tutors published for all types of concertinas from the 1830s to the present.<sup>73</sup> The chart shows a bell-shaped distribution from the 1850s through the first decade of the 1900s. The 1850s saw more tutors published than might be expected by comparison with numbers of instruments produced or with period sightings. This “front end loading” is probably the result of the newness of the keyboard system in the 1840s and 1850s, as instructors prepared to describe it for potential owners. Correspondingly, a quicker

**THE CHEAPEST CONCERTINA.**—Messrs. Boosey and Sons beg to state that CASE’S four guinea CONCERTINA is sold at a trifle above the cost price, for the express purpose of superseding the worthless instrument called the German concertina, which, from having but half the proper number of notes, is thoroughly useless in a musical sense. Case’s four guinea concertina has double action and full compass, and is a perfect concert instrument. A post-office order for four guineas will ensure the delivery of one in any part of England. Case’s concertinas may also be had of every quality and price, from £4 4s. to £12 12s. each. Instruments exchanged and let on hire. Boosey and Sons’ musical instrument warehouse, 28, Holles-street.

Figure 51. Advertisement for Case English system concertinas, complaining of German price competition and quality. *The Times*, Mar. 23, 1855; other versions of this ad ran in *The Musical World*. Case was soon to go out of business.

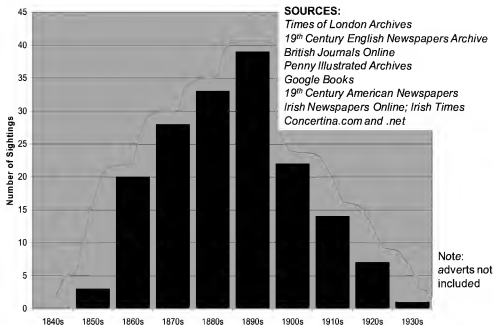


Figure 52. 'Sightings' of German system instruments in England or on English ships, in period literature. See text for explanation.

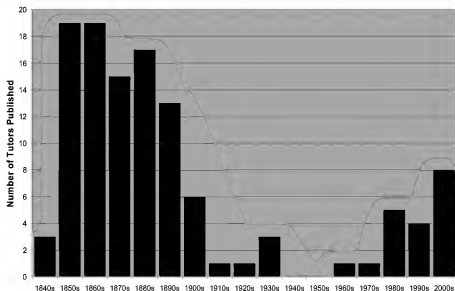


Figure 53. Numbers of English language tutors published for German system (German and Anglo-German) concertinas, by decade. Data are compiled from Randall Merris, 2003.

drop-off in tutor publishing in the first decade of the 1900s is a harbinger of the drop-off in both sightings and sales to come in the next decade.

The chart also shows a significantly low level in publishing activity from 1910 to the 1970s, followed by a fairly strong revival of interest during the last three decades (1980-2009). This “gap” parallels similar gaps in production and in sightings during that period, reflecting an early-twentieth-century plunge in interest in the concertina, discussed further below.

### Evolution of the concertina term “Anglo”

In the first decade and a half of its existence, Uhlig variously called his box an *Accordion* or a *Physharmonika*.<sup>74</sup> That situation changed after the London Exhibition of 1851, when the name *Conzertina* (and in export, German *Concertina*) took hold with German builders, perhaps due to information from a returning Carl Zimmerman that English retailers were already marketing the instruments as “German Concertinas.” As we have seen, when English makers began to build instruments with the German fingering system, the name Anglo-German was applied, probably first either by Jones or by Nickolds, Crabb, and Son. Others, like Rock Chidley, at first used the term “Improved German Fingering Concertina,” but it was the name Anglo-German that stuck. A fair amount of confusion resulted, however, as some tutors continued to use the general term German *Concertina* even for instruments made in England. An example is *Chappell’s Instruction Book for the German Concertina* of 1858 (Figure 25), which contains a drawing of one of Rock Chidley’s *English*-made instruments (Figure 35). No mention of the Anglo-German concertina appears in that tutor, despite the fact that the term had been in common marketing use for four years by that time (Figure 36 shows two examples). This situation perhaps parallels naming incongruities of our own day. Today, we may purchase “English concertinas” that are made not only in England, but in the United States, Italy and China. That term is considered generic, representing a concertina with an English

fingering system. The same was true for the term German concertina in Victorian times. The place of manufacture was of secondary importance to the type of keyboard system, except among retailers of good quality Anglo-German instruments who always made sure the public was aware of the difference in quality, as the second advertisement in Figure 36 makes clear. The first advertisement in that illustration clearly defines the new term: “Anglo-German Concertina, or English (made) Concertina with a German fingering.”

From the beginning, especially in Germany, there was a large push to get beyond the simple two-row models, making the instrument able to play in more keys. In Germany, concertinas had as many as five rows of keys as early as 1855, as we have seen. Export models were kept simpler, perhaps because of price concerns. Most exports by far were two-row, 20-key instruments, as indeed were most Anglo-German models. But at least by 1876 the familiar three-row, 30-key instrument of today was available, and George Jones published a tutor for this “Chromatic Anglo-German” concertina that year.<sup>75</sup> When he patented a 42-key instrument in 1884, however, he continued to call it an “Anglo-German” concertina. The added term “chromatic” was not considered necessary.<sup>76</sup> By 1895, such “Anglo-German” instruments from Lachenal and Jones contained as many as forty keys (Figure 54).

The term most typically used for the English-built (or equivalent) German fingering system concertina today is the *Anglo*, not the *Anglo-German* concertina. The chart in Figure 55 suggests one possible reason for the abbreviation. That chart breaks out the specific instrument name used in the various tutors for the instrument published each decade. The simple terms *concertina* or *German concertina* were the titles of choice for these instruments throughout the nineteenth century. Less common was the term *Anglo-German*, and rarer still was *Chromatic German*. While those more explicit terms helped sell higher quality concertinas, they didn’t help sell tutors, as the publishers did not wish to get too specific: they wanted to reach players of both German and Anglo-German concertinas. After

**Anglo-German Concertinas.**

WITH YELLOW METAL REEDS.

By LACHENAL &amp; Co. OF ST JAMES, LONDON.



	20 Keys	22 Keys	24 Keys	26 Keys	28 Keys	30 Keys					
Mahogany .....	28/-	...	23/-	...	25/-	...	28/-	...	30/-	...	32/-
Rosewood .....	24/-	...	26/-	...	22/-	...	21/-	...	22/-	...	26/-

**ANGLO-GERMAN CONCERTINAS.**

NEWLY-IMPROVED

By LACHENAL &amp; Co., LONDON.

Rosewood.—Five-fold morocco bellows, brass screws to tops, and containing all the recent improvements, with tempered steel reeds, specially converted for our use, and which produce the fullest and purest quality of tone ever attained. From 30 keys, six-fold bellows.

	20 Keys	22 Keys	24 Keys	26 Keys	28 Keys	30 Keys	32 Keys	36 Keys	40 Keys
50/-	56/-	60/-	65/-	70/-	72/-	75/-	80/-	90/-	

With Nickel Top, 50/- extra.

Miniature Newly-improved, 20 keys, 50/-, 5½-inches; 26 keys, 65/-, 5½-inches;

Figure 54. Anglo-German Pricelist, ca. 1895, from Henshaw and Loebell Ltd., Manchester. From Randall Merris.

1910-1920 (the decade that included World War I), the term *German* was summarily dropped in all English language tutors. Tutors for German system instruments were subsequently called either *Anglo-Chromatic* or simply *Anglo* tutors. The obvious explanation for this change entails the after-effects of the World War. After the horrific carnage of that war, where millions of English servicemen died, few persons in England wished to buy anything with the name “German” on it, so the name “German” was quietly dropped, and the instrument became the “Anglo.” Moreover, the flood of imported German concertinas had abruptly stopped during the war years, and imports from Germany did not significantly recover for decades to come. An advertisement from Lachenal in 1920 (Figure 56) shows this renaming to *Anglo concertinas*, relative to their *Anglo-German* instruments shown in an 1895 catalog (Figure 54).

The short term “Anglo,” however, did appear, albeit infrequently, in earlier years. Its earliest

known occurrence is in an advertisement of 1878 (Figure 22). A musical journal of 1898 contains another such occurrence in a reply to a reader who had asked “as to the best kind of instrument (for solo and voice accompaniment, and the key to have it made in”:

*If your enquiry relates to the genuine concertina—the concertina invented by Sir Charles Wheatstone, and associated with the names of musicians prominent in the higher ranks of the musical profession . . . (then) apply to the makers, Wheatstone and Co. . . . Your enquiry as to “what key you should have the instrument made in,” suggests, however, that you have in view the spurious order of instrument proper to the music hall and n—r minstrelsy, which has usurped the name*

*“Concertina,” and which in the trade is classed under the heads “German” and “Anglo-German” concertina. The prefix “English” has for some years been much employed to distinguish the legitimate concertina from the above order. It is to be feared that even this may cease to be a safeguard, since a recent advertisement stated that Mr. McCann would give a performance “on the English concertina;” the “Anglo,” upon which he is a clever performer, being obviously meant.”*

The writer had obviously confused Professor Maccann’s duet for an Anglo, but it is clear that the writer meant “Anglo” as an abbreviation for the term “Anglo-German.”

The indignation expressed by that writer toward the German and Anglo-German concertinas mirrored the near-bitterness that many in “proper” late nineteenth-century musical circles felt about the thorough dominance in popularity of the German system concertinas over the more socially “acceptable,” more musically versatile, and locally invented English system instrument. A large part of that indignation stemmed from the opinion held by

many that the cheap German instruments had usurped the very name *concertina* from Sir Charles Wheatstone's invention. Figure 57, upper panel, shows the usage of terms for German system concertinas (German and Anglo-German instruments) in period sightings. By far, writers and observers most commonly used the simple but unspecific term "concertina" for them. The more specific term "Anglo German concertina" was rare with journalists and writers—it was clearly too fine a distinction for general writing.

The usage of these various terms in published tutors makes the situation abundantly clear (Figure 58): the "English" concertina had lost control over its very name. In the 1840s through 1860s, most published tutors for English system instruments (the top panel, Figure 58) used only the single word "concertina." Its meaning was clear to all at the time. However, with the extraordinary growth in sales and usage of German and Anglo-German concertinas, these instruments themselves began also to be called simply "concertinas" by those writing tutors for them. As the lower chart in Figure 58 shows, half of published tutors from the 1860s through the first decade of the 1900s used that generic term. This usurpation of the simple term "concertina" offended upper-crust fans of the English system instrument, perhaps especially because this new, foreign "concertina" usurper was played by what the elite aristocracy saw as common ruffians in London streets (Chapter 2).

By the time of the inception of the concertina revival of the late twentieth century, few of the new generation of players had any memory of how the odd name *Anglo* came about, and many assume incorrectly that it is an abbreviation of *Anglo-Chromatic*. Indeed, descriptions of the instrument's origin in some revival-era, late-twentieth-century Anglo tutors go so far as to ascribe its invention to Charles Wheatstone.

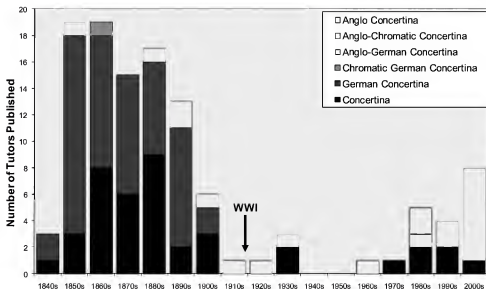


Figure 55. Instrument name used in English-language tutors for Anglo-family concertinas. Source data from Randall Merris, 2003.

**Lachenal's Celebrated Anglo Concertinas.**

All with separately fitted Screwed Notes

**ANGLO CONCERTINAS.**

MAHOGANY—30 Keys, Steel Reeds	£2 16 0	In Paper Covered Deal Boxes
“ 26 “ “	£3 12 0	
“ 30 “ “	£4 7 0	

The above are fitted with a 3-fold leather bellows, 6-fold, 3-6 extra.  
Nickel Plated Tops to the above, 22' extra.

Figure 56. Lachenal 'Anglo' Pricelist, ca. 1920. Note the disappearance of the word '-German'. With thanks to Chris Algar and The Concertina Library.

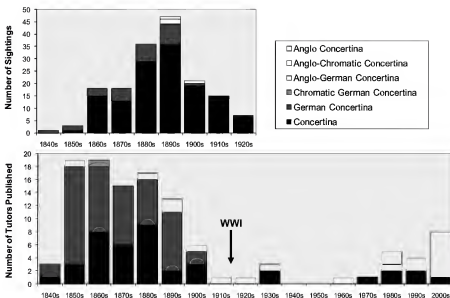


Figure 57. Top: Terms used for 'Anglo-family' instruments in 'sightings' taken from period journals, books, and newspapers. Bottom: Terms used in tutors (a duplicate of Figure 55).

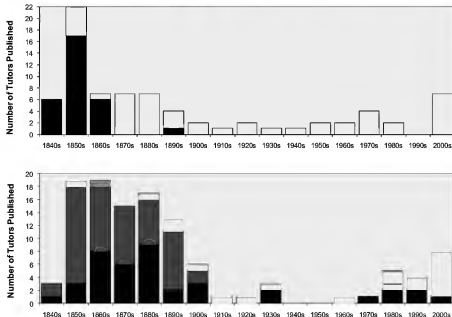


Figure 58. Top: Names used in titles of tutors for English system instruments. Stippled, 'English Concertina'; black, simply 'Concertina.' Bottom: Names used in German, Anglo-German, and Anglo tutors. Legend same as in Figure 57.

## Resources

### Information on historical builders

Further information on late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century builders in Germany and England may be found at the following places, among others:

- The Concertina Library:  
<http://www.concertina.com>
- Papers of the International Concertina Association:  
<http://www.concertina.org/pica/index.htm>
- The Concertina FAQ:  
<http://www.concertina.info>
- The Members Forum:  
<http://www.concertina.net>
- Institut für Musikforschung, Universität Würzburg:  
[http://www.musikwissenschaft.uni-wuerzburg.de/struktur/projekte UND\\_materiellen\\_des\\_lehrstuhls\\_fuer\\_ethnomusikologie/konzertina/das\\_instrument/allgemein/](http://www.musikwissenschaft.uni-wuerzburg.de/struktur/projekte UND_materiellen_des_lehrstuhls_fuer_ethnomusikologie/konzertina/das_instrument/allgemein/)

### Concertina builders of today

The manufacture of concertinas has expanded greatly in the past 40 years, as a result of revival of interest in the concertina, a global folk music revival, and global interest in Irish traditional music. Concertinas built today may be grouped into three categories: *German-style concertinas*, which like the 19th century German originals have reeds mounted on accordion-style reed blocks, of two and three rows of keys; *Anglo-German concertinas*, which have higher quality concertina-type reeds and English concertina-style action and general construction, with two to four rows of keys; and *hybrid concertinas*, which combine modern accordion reeds, mounted flat, with English concertina-style action and general construction. The latter category is a new development in the past three decades, and has done much to increase access to high-quality instruments at a relatively affordable

price. The following is a list of known builders of today.<sup>78</sup> Additional information about some of these modern-day builders will be found in subsequent, country-specific chapters.

### A. German-style concertinas

#### *Germany:*

Beschäftigungsgesellschaft Klingenthal mbH: Builds concertinas under the names Silvetta and Castiglione. Falkensteiner Str. 31, 08248 Klingenthal, Germany.

Hohner Musikinstrumente GmbH & Co. KG: Builds concertinas in several sizes. Andreas-Koch-Strasse 9, 78647 Trossingen, Germany.

#### *Italy:*

Brunner Musica s.r.l.: Builds Stagi concertinas. Zona ind. Squartabue, 62019 Recanati (MC), Italy.

#### *China:*

Concertina Connection: The Rochelle concertina is imported from China. 9811 South Big Rock Lane, P.O. Box 211, Valleyford, WA 99036, USA.

### B. Anglo-German (“Anglo”) style concertinas:

#### *England* (also see Chapter 2):

C & R Dipper & Son Concertinas: West End House, High Street, Heytesbury, Warminster BA12 0EA, England

C. Wheatstone & Co.: Steve & Mary Dickinson, 21 Bridge Street, Stowmarket, Suffolk IP14 1BP, UK

Connor Concertinas: John Connor, 30 Eastbury Avenue, Rochford, Essex SS4 1SF, England

H. Crabb, Concertina Maker: Liverpool Road, Islington, London, closed in 1989 (Geoff Crabb still builds an occasional Anglo concertina.)

#### *Australia* (also see Chapter 7):

Chris Ghent: Sydney. <http://www.concertina.com.au>



### *The Anglo-German Concertina*

Ian Simpson: Upper Nariel via Cudgewa, Victoria, Australia

Kookaburra Concertinas: Richard Evans, Lot 5, Sandham Road, Bell, NSW Australia

### ***Germany:***

Suttner Concertinas: Jürgen Suttner, Gewerbestr. 26, D-57078 Siegen, Germany

### ***Republic of South Africa*** (also see Chapter 5):

Koot Brits Concertinas: du Bruyn Street 185, Weavind Park, 0184, Republic of South Africa

Olga Concertina: Allen Green, PO Box 799 Mossel Bay, 6500, Republic of South Africa

Wifra Concertinas: Willie van Wyk, P.O.Box 1759 Rayton 1001, Republic of South Africa

Wessel Potgieter, 22 Bosduif Street, Kempton Park West 1619, Republic of South Africa

### ***United States of America*** (also see Chapter 9):

Carroll Concertinas: 912 Squire Oaks Dr., Villa Hills, KY 41017 USA

Concertina Connection: Wim Wakker, 9811 South Big Rock Lane, P.O. Box 211, Valleyford, WA 99036, USA

Kensington Concertinas: No longer accepting orders. Dana Johnson, Kensington MD, USA

Thomas Concertinas: 52 Linden Street, Frostburg, MD 21532, USA

### **C. Hybrid-style concertinas**

#### ***Belgium:***

Geuns Concertinas: Harry & Riny Geuns, Rondstraat 11, 3640 Molenbeersel/Kinrooi, Belgium

### ***Canada:***

Edgley Concertinas: Frank Edgley, 2346 Meldrum Rd., Windsor, Ontario, Canada N8W 4E4

### ***England:***

A. C. Norman & Co.: "Paddock", Rowton, Halfway House, Shrewsbury SY5 9EL

A. P. James & Co.: <http://www.apjmusic.co.uk>  
Sherwood Concertina: Hobgoblin Music, P.O. Box 4707, Worthing, BN11 9JA, UK

### ***Republic of South Africa*** (also see Chapter 5):

Boerekonsertina: Danie Labuschagne, Wilhelm Street 1233, Booysens, Pretoria 0082, Republic of South Africa

### ***United States of America*** (also see Chapter 9):

Concertina Connection: Wim Wakker, 9811 South Big Rock Lane, P.O. Box 211, Valleyford, WA 99036, USA

Herrington Bros. Concertinas: Rowlett, Texas, USA.  
<http://www.concertinas.com>

Homewood Musical Instrument Company: Bob Tedrow, 3027 Central Avenue, Birmingham, Alabama, 35209 USA

R. Morse & Co. Concertinas: The Button Box, P.O. Box 372, Sunderland, MA 01375 USA

### ***Wales:***

Marcus Music: Tredegar House, Newport, Gwent, Wales, U.K. NP10 8YW

### **Dealers in vintage concertinas**

Barleycorn Concertinas: Chris Algar, Stoke-on-Trent, England: <http://www.concertina.co.uk>

Hobgoblin Music: P.O. Box 4707, Worthing, BN11 9JA, UK

The Button Box: P.O. Box 372, Sunderland, MA 01375 USA

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Chris Algar, Stephen Chambers, Robert Gaskins, David Lee, Randall Merris, and Wes Williams, "Charles Jeffries: The Man and His Family" (2005), The Concertina Library, <http://www.concertina.com>.
- <sup>2</sup> Neil Wayne, "The Wheatstone English Concertina," *The Galpin Society Journal* 44, (1991): pp. 117-149. Now also available online at The Concertina Library, <http://www.concertina.com>.
- <sup>3</sup> Allan W. Atlas, *The Wheatstone English Concertina in Victorian England* (Oxford University Press, 1996).
- <sup>4</sup> Maria Dunkel, *Akkordeon, Bandoneon, Concertina im Kontext der Harmonikinstrumente* [in German] (Augemus Musikverlag Bochum, 1999).
- <sup>5</sup> LaVern J. Rippley, *The Chemnitzer Concertina, A History and an Accolade* (Northfield MN: St. Olaf College Press, 2006).
- <sup>6</sup> Pat Missin, "Who invented the harmonica?" (2007), <http://www.patmissin.com>.
- <sup>7</sup> Stephen Chambers, "An Annotated Catalogue of Historic European Free- Reed Instruments from my Private Collection" (2004), <http://www.concertina.com>.
- <sup>8</sup> *Nationmaster Encyclopedia* (online), "Anton Haeckl," <http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Anton-Haeckl> (accessed October 29, 2009).
- <sup>9</sup> *Nationmaster Encyclopedia* (online), "Christian Friedrich Ludwig Buschmann," <http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Christian-Friedrich-Ludwig-Buschmann> (accessed October 29, 2009).
- <sup>10</sup> Chambers, "Annotated Catalogue" (2004). The usual accounts that a Bohemian named Richter invented the push-pull diatonic keyboard arrangement for the harmonica in the 1820s are probably erroneous and his contribution to mouth-blown harmonicas probably came later, related more to the arrangement of reeds in the harmonica case rather than to the push-pull scale itself, which he may well have copied from early accordion makers (see Pat Missin, "Who invented the harmonica?" 2007).
- <sup>11</sup> Most information in this paragraph has been paraphrased from LaVern J. Rippley, *Chemnitzer Concertina* (2006), pp.1-2.
- <sup>12</sup> Chambers, "Annotated Catalogue" (2004).
- <sup>13</sup> Now called Brückenstrasse, according to LaVern J. Rippley, *Chemnitzer Concertina* (2006), p.2. Allied bombing during World War II destroyed the building.
- <sup>14</sup> Johann David Wünsch, *Autobiography of Johann David Wünsch* [in German] (privately published,

1894), I am indebted to Federico Wünsch, a descendant of Johann David Wünsch in Santiago Chile, for access to this document, and to Henrik Müller for assistance in translating it.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Peer Ehmke, Notes to accompany the exhibit *Sehnsucht aus dem Blasebalg: Concertina und Bandoneon in Chemnitz* (Germany), <http://www.chemnitz-concertina.de/de/index.htm>. Also see LaVern Rippley, *Chemnitzer Concertina* (2006), p. 16.

<sup>17</sup> Rippley, *Chemnitzer Concertina* (2006), p. 16.

<sup>18</sup> Peer Ehmke to the author, personal communication, 2007, and Rippley, *Chemnitzer Concertina* (2006), pp. 17-18.

<sup>19</sup> Stephen Chambers and Dan Worrall, "Earliest Known German Concertina Tutor: 'Anweisung das Accordion zu spielen'" (2005), <http://www.concertina.com/worrall/hoeselbarth-tutor/index.htm>.

<sup>20</sup> Randall C. Merris and Dan Worrall, "Earliest Known English-Language German Concertina Tutor: Minasi's 'Instruction Book' of 1846" (2005), The Concertina Library, <http://www.concertina.com>.

<sup>21</sup> Randall Merris, "Instruction Manuals for the English, Anglo, and Duet Concertina: An Annotated Bibliography" (2003), The Concertina Library, <http://www.concertina.com>.

<sup>22</sup> Although it has been reported by Maria Dunkel (*Bandoneon und Konzertina*, 1987) that Hector Berlioz mentioned the term "German concertina" (le Concertina Allemand) in his *Grand Treatise of Instrumentation in the Modern Orchestra* of 1844, which would be the earliest known use of the term, in fact that reference came from the 1856 second edition, when Berlioz added a chapter on "New Instruments" which included a discussion of the English and (very briefly) German concertinas. Hugh MacDonald prepared a 2002 re-translation of the *Treatise* that discussed the addition of that new chapter in the updated edition in 1856 (see his p. xxiii).

<sup>23</sup> Biographical information on Zimmerman is available from two main sources: an autobiography (undated), found in the Library at University of North Carolina at Chappell Hill, and in "A Search for harmony: the Strange Career of Carl Zimmerman, the Inventor of the Autoharp," (*St. Louis Globe-Dispatch*, March 1 1885): p.7. There is a good summary of his autobiography in Becky Blackley, *The Autoharp Book* (I.A.D. Publications, 1983).

<sup>24</sup> Peer Ehmke, Schlossberg Museum, to the author, personal communication (2007); Stephen Chambers,

"An Annotated Catalogue of Historic European Free-Reed Instruments from my Private Collection," 2004, (online): [www.concertina.com](http://www.concertina.com) (accessed October 29, 2009).

<sup>25</sup> Rippley, *Chemnitz Concertina* (2006), p. 7.

<sup>26</sup> LaVern Rippley, op. cit., pp. 24-25.

<sup>27</sup> Rippley, *Chemnitz Concertina* (2006), p. 19.

<sup>28</sup> Randall Merris and Dan Worrall, "Minasi's 'Instruction Book' of 1846" (2005), <http://www.concertina.com/merris/minasi-german-tutor-1846/index.htm>.

<sup>29</sup> See the chapters for each of these countries for documentation of early distribution.

<sup>30</sup> Henry Mayhew, "Concertina Player on the Steamboats," *London Labour and the London Poor*, vol. 3 (1861), with introductory note from Allan Atlas, *Papers of the International Concertina Association*, v. 1 (2004).

<sup>31</sup> Mayhew, "Concertina Player," (1861).

<sup>32</sup> *The Blind Girl*, by Sir John Everett Millais [1829-1896] (1856).

<sup>33</sup> For currency translations to modern currency in this report, the author used the calculator by Randall Merris and Robert Gaskins; see "Calculate Modern Values of Historic Concertina Prices," 2005, at the Concertina Library, <http://www.concertina.com>. Such calculated equivalent prices should be considered approximate.

<sup>34</sup> G. Phillips Bevan, ed., *British Manufacturing Industries* (Edward Stanford, publisher, London, 1876), p. 140.

<sup>35</sup> "Exports declared for the United States During the Fiscal Year Ended June 6, 1901", (U.S. Congress, House, January 1, 1902), p. 194.

<sup>36</sup> Henry Birchenough, *Report on the Present Position and Future Prospects of British Trade in South Africa*, (London, His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1903), p. 113.

<sup>37</sup> George Jones, "Recollections of the English Concertina," Robert Gaskins, ed. (from 1844, edited 2004), The Concertina Library, <http://www.concertina.com>. George Jones was born February 29, 1832.

<sup>38</sup> "The Retirement of Mr. G. Jones," notice in *Musical Opinion & Music Trade Review*, no. 264 (1899): p. 851. Article also available online at The Concertina Library, <http://www.concertina.com>. Also see Jones, "Recollections" (2004).

<sup>39</sup> Wayne, "Wheatstone English Concertina" (1991).

<sup>40</sup> Chambers, "Annotated Catalogue" (2004).

<sup>41</sup> Jones, "Recollections" (2004).

<sup>42</sup> Frank Butler, "Concertinas in the Commercial Road: The Story of George Jones," *Concertina and Squeezbox Magazine*, Issue 20 (2004): The Concertina Library, <http://www.concertina.com>.

<sup>43</sup> See Stephen Chambers, "Louis Lachenal, Engineer and Concertina Manufacturer" (2004), p. 7-18. Earlier published in *The Free Reed Journal*, v. 1, (1999). Also available online in The Concertina Library, <http://www.concertina.com>.

<sup>44</sup> Wayne, "Wheatstone English Concertina" (1991).

<sup>45</sup> Chambers, "Annotated Catalogue" (2004).

<sup>46</sup> Rock Chidley, *Instructions for the German Fingering Concertina* (Rock Chidley, 135 High Holborn Street, London, 1858).

<sup>47</sup> Neil Wayne, *The Concertina Museum*, vols. 1-5, (unpublished notes and photographs to accompany the Wayne collection of concertinas at the Horniman Museum, London, 1986).

<sup>48</sup> *The Times*, Sept. 23 1862, according to Chris Flint. Chris Flint to the author, personal communication, 2008.

<sup>49</sup> One enigmatic early instrument is worthy of a brief footnote. A rectangular-sided, 10-keyed instrument in the collection of Stephen Chambers ("Annotated Catalogue," 2004) is marked as "by C. Eulenstein, Inventor," with its case engraved with the date 1835. It is not known whether this instrument has the arrangement of notes of the ten-row Uhlig instrument, invented in Germany the previous year. Eulenstein was a virtuoso on the Jews' harp who lived in England but who was a frequent visitor to the Continent. The rectangular-sided instrument, according to Chambers, may be a copy of Uhlig's instrument, possibly made by Wheatstone's workmen, as some exterior features are similar. Regardless, it appears to be a one-of-a-kind instrument and, with its shape and unusual array of keys (4 + 1 on each side), it is not closely similar to later Anglo-German instruments. Further investigations of the pitches, and hence arrangement of its notes, will more fully characterize it.

<sup>50</sup> The information in this paragraph is largely taken from a) Stephen Chambers, "Louis Lachenal, Engineer" (2004), part 1, and b) Stephen Chambers, "Some Notes on Lachenal Concertina Production and Serial Numbers," (2005), The Concertina Library, <http://www.concertina.com>.

<sup>51</sup> Stephen Chambers, "Lachenal Concertina Production" (2005).

<sup>52</sup> Shipping, *The Brisbane Courier* (September 19, 1877).

<sup>53</sup> Advertisement for Izatt and Son, *The Brisbane Courier* (June 26, 1895): p. 8.

<sup>54</sup> The information in this paragraph, including the quotation, came largely from Chris Algar, Stephen Chambers, Robert Gaskins, David Lee, Randall Merris, and Wes Williams, "Charles Jeffries: The Man and His Family" (2005), The Concertina Library, <http://www.concertina.com>.

<sup>55</sup> Information in this paragraph is largely from Wayne, "Wheatstone English Concertina" (1991).

<sup>56</sup> Wayne, "Wheatstone English Concertina" (1991).

<sup>57</sup> Randall Merris to the author, personal communication, 2009.

<sup>58</sup> Horniman Museum, "Wheatstone & Co. Concertina Ledgers," The Concertina Library, <http://www.concertina.com>.

<sup>59</sup> The discussion that follows was paraphrased from an anonymous article entitled "John Stanley-Concertina Doctor," *Concertina Magazine*, Winter (1982): pp. 2-3.

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, Wes Williams, "Serial Number Muddle in Early Wheatstone Ledgers" (2005), and Margaret Birley, "A project to digitize the ledgers of the C. Wheatstone & Co. concertina factory at the Horniman Museum, London" (2005), both at The Concertina Library, <http://www.concertina.com>.

<sup>61</sup> Randall Merris, personal communication, 2008.

<sup>62</sup> Stuart Eydmann, *The Life and Times of the Concertina: The adoption and usage of a novel musical instrument with particular reference to Scotland* (2005), The Concertina Library, <http://www.concertina.com>.

<sup>63</sup> Stephen Chambers to the author, personal communication, 2008.

<sup>64</sup> The data, the plots, and the extrapolations are the subject of a report in preparation by Messrs. Merris, Algar, and Worrall.

<sup>65</sup> G. Phillips Bevan, ed., *British Manufacturing Industries*, (Edward Stanford, publisher, London, 1876), p. 140.

<sup>66</sup> These demographic estimates come from Sally Mitchell, *Daily Life in Victorian England* (Greenwood Publishing Group, Westport Connecticut, 1996), chapter 2.

<sup>67</sup> Sally Mitchell, *Daily Life*, 1996.

<sup>68</sup> Randall Merris, "Instruction Manuals."

<sup>69</sup> Stuart Eydmann, *The Life and Times of the Concertina*.

<sup>70</sup> Wayne, "Wheatstone English Concertina" (1991).

<sup>71</sup> Stephen Chambers, as quoted in Wes Williams, "Other Makers and Dealers" (2004): <http://www.lvcott.fsnet.co.uk/others.htm#Harley>.

<sup>72</sup> Williams, "Other Makers" (2004).

<sup>73</sup> Randall Merris, "Instruction Manuals for the English, Anglo, and Duet Concertina: An Annotated Bibliography" (2003), The Concertina Library, <http://www.concertina.com>.

<sup>74</sup> LaVern J. Rippley, *The Chemnitzer Concertina, A History and an Accolade*, p. 1-2.

<sup>75</sup> See Merris, "Instruction Manuals" (2003).

<sup>76</sup> George Jones, "Improvements in Anglo-German Concertinas" (1884), The Concertina Library, <http://www.concertina.com>.

<sup>77</sup> Correspondence, *The Musical Herald*, Nov. 1, 1898.

<sup>78</sup> I thank Daniel Hersh for his compilation efforts in building most of this list of concertina builders.



## Chapter 2. German and Anglo-German Concertinas in England<sup>1</sup>

*O, all ye who're "stuck up" and proud,  
To Southend for pleasure don't go;  
Society's there free and loud,  
And sure to impress you as low:  
Most likely you'd find 'Arry there,  
Chaff, gay concertina and all,  
And 'tisn't "a 'aughty swell's stare"  
Will ever make 'Arry sing small.*

—Anonymous, Songs of the Watering Places: *Fun*, 1885

### *Background: English Social Trends in the Late Nineteenth Century*

England in the Victorian era witnessed profound social and demographic changes that strongly shaped the ways in which German and Anglo-German concertinas were used, both in urban and rural environments. It may be useful for some readers, especially those not from the United Kingdom, to briefly consider some of those changes before proceeding with a discussion of the use of these concertinas in urban and rural England.

From 1851 to 1911, the population of England and Wales doubled from about 18 million persons to over 36 million. Most of this growth took place in the cities, which grew disproportionately compared to declining rural areas. This urban growth occurred primarily through migration of unemployed farm workers and other laborers, with their families, from the English countryside, and, secondarily, through foreign immigration.

An index map of England and Scotland (Figure 1) shows generalized areas of net migration (areas of net gains and losses in population) for the period 1851-1911. Such areas were determined in a 1986 demographic study by John Langton and Robert John Morris, who measured the difference between natural population increase and the actual population

change measured between censuses. As the figure shows, population in most rural areas declined during this period, and nearly all net gains occurred in urban areas and within London's burgeoning suburbs.<sup>2</sup> The extent of rural decline was quite large. For example, the total number of men engaged as agricultural laborers countrywide declined by 40 percent from 1861 and 1901.<sup>3</sup> Large declines also occurred in numbers of women agricultural workers and servants, as well as in shopkeepers and tradesmen for many rural towns. In the four decades from 1871 to 1911, fully 2,613,000 people migrated away from rural areas in England and Wales. Of these, 1,983,000 migrated into English cities. The remaining 620,000 left the country altogether.<sup>4</sup>

This large internal migration away from rural areas was caused primarily by decline of the agricultural economy which, in turn, was caused largely by increased foreign competition in grain production—especially from North America. Between 1868 and 1902 the cost of grain freight between Chicago and Liverpool fell over 70 percent.<sup>5</sup> This decline in shipping cost, coupled with the free trade policy in effect in Britain, meant that grain from the vast wheat fields of North America undercut local prices. Many English grain fields were turned into grass pasture as a result. Additional reasons for loss of farm jobs included the local adoption of more

efficient farming practices and mechanization, which needed fewer workers. Relative to the previous century, poverty increased significantly in rural areas, and families that had been in place for centuries were forced to move in order to survive. With a maturing train and road infrastructure, internal migration to English cities was a readily available option for these unemployed rural workers and their families.

Population gains within Victorian cities were large. The population of Liverpool doubled from 375,955 in 1851 to 746,421 in 1911. Most of that growth was due to migration, as about 60,000 people per decade migrated into Liverpool during that period. (Natural growth in large Victorian cities tended to be low due to high mortality rates). Of those persons migrating from within Great Britain into Liverpool in 1901, only 12% were from Ireland, Scotland, and Wales: the rest were English migrants from rural areas.<sup>6</sup> London and its suburbs realized the largest gains of any city during this period. From a population of 2,363,000 in 1851, it more than tripled to 7,161,000 by 1911, gaining a staggering 800,000 people per decade, most of them immigrants. Most came from within England, but a significant number arrived from Ireland, Germany and Italy.

A large portion of migrating ex-farm workers became employed in a large and rapidly growing service industry, especially in London and other prosperous cities in southern England.<sup>7</sup> These hordes of unemployed migrants formed an immense pool of low-cost labor, and many became servants for both the upper class and a growing middle class. Not all found such regular work however, and these typically devised their own employment, as chimney sweeps, costers (street sellers of vegetables), house painters—and street musicians. London in the late nineteenth century was awash in such self-employed professional musicians, some of whom earned comfortable livings. The less talented or less fortunate supported themselves by begging and crime—the familiar trappings of Dickens' novels. The inexpensive German concertina was a favorite instrument of the Victorian working class, and unsurprisingly many of the “sightings”

of it in period documents are related to incidents either in an emptying and impoverished countryside or in the rough-and-tumble world of urban streets.

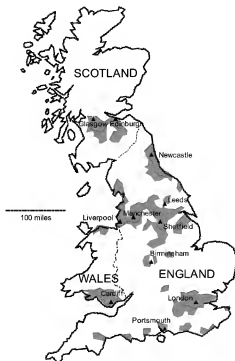


Figure 1. Population change due to migration, Britain, 1851 to 1911. Migration patterns shown are generalized from Langton and Morris, *Atlas of Industrialising Britain*, 1986. They determined these patterns by measuring the difference between natural population increase and the actual change in population, between censuses of 1851 and 1911. Areas shaded gray gained population via migration, and un-shaded areas lost. The Victorian era witnessed an enormous migration of people from rural areas to the cities.

## Urban Victorian Street Culture and the Concertina

### Irritation and joy

Many period observers have documented the amazing, vibrant, and at times noisy and irritating street entertainers of Victorian London and other English cities and seaside resorts. In a world before government welfare, impoverished migrating newcomers as well as a large number of unemployed long-time urbanites stepped up to do almost anything for a few copper coins, as Jerry White notes in his history of London in the nineteenth century:

*There were the clowns or "Billy Barlows"; jugglers, some on stilts, and slack-rope walkers; street dancers like Madeleine Sinclair, who danced the Highland fling to a street organ all over London in the early 1860s, her dress and visage so masculine that audiences disputed whether she was a man or not; strong men, street conjurors, many acrobats who, dozens strong, attracted crowds of idlers to Trafalgar Square on summer evenings in the 1860s. More daring still, the young "Female Salamander", around 1820, exhibited in a caravan in City Road: she seized red-hot pokers, caught drops of molten lead on her tongue and dipped her feet in boiling oil. More than seventy years later Albert Lieck watched a "big negro" in the City streets throw giant potatoes high in the air and let them smash to pieces on his forehead. And Mayhew found an acrobat who did "headsprings". He ran along for a few yards and then threw himself violently on his head and so turned "head over heels" without using his hands. He was aided by a large callous lump at the front of his skull. He could also "run round his head", resting feet on the floor; and bend over backwards to pick up pins from the ground with his eyelids. Men like this would try anything to strike awe in a crowd and draw a penny from reluctant pockets.<sup>8</sup>*

And then there were the street musicians—droves of them. German and Italian immigrants performed mainly as brass "German bands" or

Italian organ grinders. The Italians also included large numbers of small boys brought over by adult overseers as contract itinerant beggar-musicians.<sup>9</sup> Among the mostly native English remainder were what Mayhew termed "the skilful and the blind": professional street musicians who either entertained with their musical talent or, alternatively, eked out a living by exploiting the pathos of their condition. In addition, many from both the working and middle classes played music in the streets and parks of the cities for their own amusement during leisure hours. Most urban housing of the era was at best cramped, and people took every opportunity of a nice weekend day to head for the streets and parks with their friends—and their musical instruments.

The result was a noisy cacophony in the urban Victorian streets, as illustrated in a drawing (Figure 2) and its accompanying bit of doggerel from Punch from 1892:

The Music in Our Street: a Word from a Girl who Lives in It:

Did you ever 'ear our music?  
What, never? *There's* a shame;  
I tell yer it's golopshus,  
we do 'ave such a game.  
When the sun's a-shinin' brightly,  
when the fog's upon the town,  
When the frost 'as bust the water-pipes,  
when rain comes pourin' down;  
In the mornin' when the costers  
come a-shoutin' with their mokes,  
In the evenin' when the gals walk out  
a-spoonin' with their blokes,  
When Mother's slappin' Billy, or when  
Father wants 'is tea,  
When the boys are in the "Spotted Dog"  
a 'avin' of a spree,  
No matter what the weather is,  
or what the time o' day,  
Our music allus visits us,  
and never goes away.

And when they've tooned themselves to-rights,  
I tell yer it's a treat  
Just to listen to the lot o' 'em  
a-playin' in our street.  
There's a chap as turns the organ  
—the best I ever 'eard—



Oh lor' he does just jabber,  
but you can't make out a word.  
I can't abear Italians,  
as allus uses knives,  
And talks a furrin lingo  
all their miserable lives.  
But this one calls me Bella  
—which my Christian name is Sue—  
And 'e smiles and turns 'is orgin  
very proper, that he do.

Sometimes 'e plays a polker  
and sometimes it's a march,  
And I see 'is teeth all shinin'  
through 'is lovely black mustarch.  
And the little uns dance round him,  
you'd laugh until you cried  
If you saw my little brothers  
do their 'ornpipes side by side,  
And the gals they spin about as well,  
and don't they move their feet,  
When they 'ear that pianner-organ man,  
as plays about our street.

There's a feller plays a cornet too,  
and wears a ulster coat,  
My eye, 'e does puff out 'is cheeks  
a-tryin' for 'is note.  
It seems to go right through yer,  
and, oh, it's right-down rare  
When 'e gives us "*Amie Laurie*"  
or "*Sweet Spirit, 'ear my Prayer*";  
'E 's so stout that when 'e 's blowin' 'ard  
you think 'e must go pop;  
And 'is nose is like the lamp (what's red)  
outside a chemist's shop.  
And another blows the penny-pipe,  
—I allus thinks it's thin,  
And I much prefers the cornet  
when 'e ain't bin drinkin' gin.

And there's *Concertina*-Jimmy,  
it makes yer want to shout  
When 'e acts just like a windmill  
and waves 'is arms about.  
Oh, I'll lay you 'alf a tanner,  
you'll find it 'ard to beat  
The good old 'caps of music that  
they gives us in our street. . . .<sup>10</sup>



Figure 2. London street musicians, from *Punch*, 1882. See accompanying text for explanation, and note the concertina player, standing behind and slightly to the left of the organ grinder.

Injecting humor into what was to some a noisy intrusion was common practice. The following poem is from *Vagrant Verses*, an 1876 book by George Brodie. It lays out the trials of a man having difficulty making a proposal for marriage because of the incessant street noise outside his beloved's window, in Brighton in August—the concertina player being just one of a string of interruptions from the street:

#### Wooing Under Distress

Sweet Seraphina, believe me when I say—  
(Any fresh macka-reel or prawns to-day.)  
Your image ever shall be next to my heart.  
(What noise is that? Of course, the water-cart.)

I ask you, dearest, if you cannot find  
Any—(scissors to grind, or knives to grind?)  
Any small corner in your heart for me?  
(Bagpipes and Highland fling at number three).

Oh, gentle maiden with the drooping eye,  
I must remark—(A fly, sir! Want a fly?)  
Talk not of money, all true livers scorn it.  
(The overture to "Zampa" on the cornet.)

From your sweet face I cannot take my gaze.  
(An organ grinding out the "Marseillaise.")  
Don't keep me, I implore you, on the rack!  
(How that brass band is murdering Offenbach.)

You recollect our rambles, Seraphina—  
(Ha! That's the cripple with the *concertina*.)  
When by the wind your golden hair was fanned?  
(Hurrah! Here comes the opposition band.) . . .

To paint the beauty of your—(fine fresh eels.)  
So far do you all other girls excel;  
Your voice reminds me of—(the muffin bell.)

Dismiss me not in doubt, my peerless queen—  
(... Three banjos, bones, and tambourine.)  
If cruelly my budding hopes you nip, I—  
(Full chorus, "Floating Down the Mississippi.")<sup>11</sup>

Not all such street music was met with humor, as the following two accounts attest. Both passages list concertina players as among the

offenders. The first is from the Boston Herald, 1897:

#### London's Many Noises

*Here is a fair day's count from 9 A.M. to midnight: Four brass bands, nine street pianos, five singing beggars, one comic vocalist, a burnt-cork minstrel troupe, a dancing bear led by a man with a drum, a Punch and Judy show with drum, two cornetists, one fiend with a flute, seven milkmen, eleven peddlers, two chimney sweeps, two *concertina* processions, and three groups of intoxicated choristers. There is something like one disturbance every fifteen minutes for fifteen hours!*<sup>12</sup>

The second is from the book *Itinerant Music Abroad and at Home*, by Professor Ella, 1878:

*[The] . . . itinerant music of the [London] streets . . . is an insufferable annoyance to musicians. In the little square where I now reside, recommended to me for quiet and study, I am favored, morning and evening, with the performances of a German band. . . . In addition to the above voluntary serenades, I have to endure, from 10 A.M. to P.M. (!), the intolerable pest of seven or eight Italian brigands playing organs, one worse than the rest, with drone basses, which none but Scotchmen could possibly listen to without pain. Added to this diurnal programme, we are favoured with an Italian and his monkey, a ruffiano who swallows burning hemp to the beating of a big drum, and a minstrel who sings to the accompaniment of that odious nasal instrument—the *concertina*!*<sup>13</sup>

Charles Dickens was also not amused, and wrote a long article in his *All the Year Round* (1868) that listed in great detail a full day's worth of musical annoyances outside his window, hour by hour. He notes that, during a long day filled with such annoyances, a concertina player came by in the early evening:

*Six o'clock.—An old man with a fiddle; an old woman with a *concertina*; and a younger woman*

with a baby at her breast. The younger woman sings, and the older performers murder the music. This is even a worse infliction than the barrel organ; and lasts for about five minutes. Much as the street seems to love music, it evidently does not love this specimen of harmony, and not a single halfpenny rewards the trio.<sup>14</sup>

As he ended his long account of the day's annoyances, Dickens summed up the situation as follows:

*The above is a fair and true account, and an unvarnished tale of a day's music and misery in London. The real music was not much; the real misery was very considerable. Is there no remedy for such wrong? . . . Cannot music, or the murderers of music in the streets, by unauthorized performers be prevented? Or if the children and the servants, and the idle people generally, must have music, cannot the infliction be concentrated within a couple of hours each day. People must not bathe in the Serpentine after eight in the morning; why should people be allowed to make hideous noises anywhere and everywhere in the business hours of the day?*<sup>15</sup>



Figure 3. Vagrant street concertina performer, just before being doused with a pitcher of water from an unhappy resident. From a postcard ca. 1890, with thanks to Alan Day.

A few truly noxious street musicians extorted payment by annoying people who wished them to leave, such as these 1856 street minstrels, described in a story captured by Henry Mayhew:

*When we are out pitching, the finest place for us is where there is anybody sick. If we can see some straw on the ground, or any tan, then we stays. [Note: straw was often placed on the roads in front of houses where an ill person inside the home needed rest; the straw deadened the noise of passing wagons and horses' hooves.] We are sure to play up where the blinds are drawn down. When we have struck up, we rattle away the banjos, and down will come the servant, saying, "You're to move on; we don't want you." Then I'll pretend not to understand what she says, and I'll say, "Mary Blane did you ask for? O yes, certainly, Miss;" and off we'll go into a full chorus. We don't move for less than a bob, for sixpence ain't enough for a man that's ill. We generally get our two shillings.<sup>16</sup>*

The inventor Charles Babbage (he of the computing machine) was an outspoken critic of street music, as this passage from 1864 attests:

*With respect to the remedies against street music, I am not at all sanguine. The only one which is certain is, positively to forbid it in all cases, and with it also the varied vocal noises made by persons parading the streets singing, relating tales, praying, offering trifling articles for sale, &c., all of them with the transparent object of begging. In all these cases which admit of it, the police ought to be directed to take possession of the offensive instrument and convey it to the police court, there to await the decision of the magistrate.<sup>17</sup>*

Babbage and his friend and MP Michael Thomas Bass (of brewing fame) prodded Parliament to action, and legislation was passed on July 7, 1864, restricting when and where street musicians could play.<sup>18</sup> It had little effect, as above comments from the later years 1868, 1878, and 1897 attest. The numbers of poverty-stricken

domestic and foreign immigrants on the streets of London were simply too large, and few citizens in that day could imagine any other solution to fund monetary relief than the donations that street performances and begging provided—short of jobs, which were in inadequate supply.

The ranks of these street musicians, and in particular the concertina players among them, were extremely varied. We shall now explore some of them in somewhat more detail.

### The professional buskers

At the top of the heap of street performers stood skilled musicians who, in a modern, more prosperous time, might have been employed in civic symphonies, in the commercial television and recording industry, or as secondary school music teachers. In Victorian London, however, most such talent used the street as a workplace—or at least those musicians did who couldn't land a position in the music halls. By the early twentieth century many more indoor venues existed, including pubs and music halls, where these people could work indoors, but such was not the case during much of the late nineteenth century.



Figure 4. Street busker, from a 1904 postcard. From Stuart Eydmann and *The Concertina Library*.

Although German brass band players and Italian organ grinders were common, the majority of Victorian street musicians were of English nationality, as the following 1881 account by an American observer in London makes clear. Although the musicians described do not include a concertina player, it nonetheless provides a good introduction to the professional buskers of the time:

*I took one of the steamers at London bridge. . . . On the boat was a little band of minstrels, who were allowed to play for the few pence they could get. There was a fiddle, a flute, and a harp; . . . their music was not very bad, and mingled with the splash of the boat as we glided by the old wharves and the Thames Embankment. Euterpe had not watched carefully over these her poor votaries, who were sadly neglected and forlorn. Their clothes had plainly been worn out by predecessors in their occupancy, and had never fitted them; and they were shiny and drawn into rucks. Their trousers were darned at the knees with thread not so exactly of the color of the cloth as a punctilious tailor might have desired. And yet their shoes, although in one case tied with twine, were well blackened, and they wore chimney-pot hats; battered, indeed . . . but still they were chimney-pots.*

*When the time had come for collecting contributions, and the flute was going round, hat in hand, I spoke to the violin, who did not resent my intrusion. I asked him if they did well on the boats. "Purty well, sir, thank 'e, —purty well, as things goes. But music isn't 'preciated now as 't used to be; 'r else Hi shouldn't be 'ere." "No, indeed; you're something of a musician, I should say." "Somethink!"—a pause of admiring consciousness. "Wy, sir, Hi 'ave played in a band—in horchesters. Hi've played in gentlemen's 'ouses; heven in Russell Square, wen they give their parties."*

*We in the United States lose a great deal by having none but foreigners in positions like this. Our relations with those in the humbler walks of life are always with Germans, Irish, Italians, or*

most rarely, French. Our street musicians, for example, are invariably Germans or Italians. And thus our sympathies are narrowed and limited, and our sight of life is all along one plane.<sup>19</sup>

Another London steamboat musician was captured in a series of sketches by Henry Mayhew, first in a book about the London poor in the 1850s.<sup>20</sup> Much later it reappeared in a lengthier account in an article on "Bohemian London" published in 1870. One of his informants was a young boy who earned a livelihood as a concertina player on a steamboat. His varied experiences at eking out a living with a German concertina, both on and off the street, are similar to that described by the above violinist:

His "general run," he stated, was down to Hungerford and back to Blackfriars. . . . His most admired performance was a piece entitled "The Camp." He and his mate played it together. It lasted about a quarter of an hour. It contained an imitation of a bugle and a fife, and all the different tunes soldiers marched to. Some people were alleged to be so fond of it as to come up to the executant, and ask to have it all over again. Our informant having no technical knowledge of music, and playing simply by ear, complained that sometimes he would forget the tunes, they would go right out of his head, and then perhaps in a month they would come back again.

"At night," said our informant, "when I leave school I go to play music three times a week at a ball. . . . It is in the Westminster Road, and there are generally about two hundred there. They pay one shilling each. We teach on three nights a week, and the pupils assemble and practice on the other nights. There are four musicians: a fiddle, a harp, a fife, and a *concertina*. The room is like a street almost, and the music sounds well in it. I didn't have my stand in front of me when I'm playing. I never look at the others' music, I look at the dancing. At first I didn't know the exact time to leave off, but I found out that with practice. . . . I take all the money home to father,

and he gives me a few halfpence for myself. The concertina, however, cost me sixteen shillings, but I have got a beautiful instrument at home. I gave a pound for it, and it is worth two. They are made in Germany, and when they come over here they are took to a warehouse.

When once I begin to play I don't know when to leave off. If I hadn't been out in the boats I must have a play just the same—I like it very much. The *concertina* is just like a full band. It goes with the harp beautiful. The fiddle is good, but nothing like the *concertina*.

In winter I go down the river all the same and play in the cabins. Some of the passengers will object to it if they are reading, and then I have to leave off. . . . Pleasure people are my best customers; they most often ask for dance tunes. I don't know much operatic music, only one or two airs, but they are easier to play on the *concertina* than lively music, because it is difficult to move the fingers very quickly. A hornpipe makes your arm ache before you can play it all through. Gentlemen coming from business mostly prefer song tunes.

The first instrument I had was an accordion. . . . I didn't fancy it, somehow. I used to see boys about my own height carrying *concertinas* in the street, and I wanted one. The instrument was very fashionable at the time [the early 1850s], nearly everyone tried to play on it. . . . When first I started on the boats I used to make a heap of money. The first day of all I took about nine shillings, in halfpence and fourpenny bits. Going backwards and forwards between Woolwich and London I would earn as much as half a sovereign. I stuck to my work every day of the week for a season.<sup>21</sup>

Buskers were to be found not only on the ferryboats, but on the trains as well, and their efforts to make music and raise money were often considered annoying by passengers. They seem to have varied quite widely in skill levels. At Clerkenwell Police Court (London) in October 1868, young Philip Surrell, aged eighteen, was

charged with assaulting train guard Henry Hotter, who said that:

*On arriving at the Newington Road station complaints were made to me by the passengers of the defendant playing a concertina in a second-class carriage. . . . I spoke to him about playing his concertina, and said he could not go any further with the train. I told him to alight, but he would not, and made use of very bad language . . . . He had no ticket. People have complained several times of the nuisance of musicians annoying them by playing their instruments.*<sup>22</sup>

The youth assaulted the guard, and was later imprisoned for fourteen days. Another occurrence a year later in 1869 underscored how common the practice of busking on trains was:

*Sir, —I wish to draw your attention to a nuisance which annoys a great number of your subscribers. I allude to the musicians of the Underground Railway. There are a number of boys, whose ages vary from twelve upwards, who play upon various instruments. Their plan is to watch for a full compartment, and get in there and play a few tunes; after which they pass their cap round for a few coppers, and leave at the next station. . . . The number of these fellows is increasing. Last week I travelled from Victoria to Kensington and back. On my road thither I was treated to a duet between violin and cornet. On my return, another pair of duettists performed on violin and German concertina. There is also on the line a solo violin and performer on the German concertina. The rattle of the train is disagreeable; supplemented by the shrieking of untunable or intoned instruments, it is unbearable. If the passengers had sufficient sense to refuse to give anything to them, they would leave; but as they are so foolish or weak as to pay for being tortured, on the part of the more sensible and more sensitive, I ask you to endeavor to suppress these six or more nuisances.*

(Signed) A Man With an Ear.<sup>23</sup>



Figure 5. A 1904 postcard, showing third class passengers in London delighted by the approach of a concertina player, notwithstanding period press accounts to the contrary. From the collection of Stephen Chambers.

Such complaints do not tell the whole story, however. Many people enjoyed the music, and often it was a highbrow member of the social elite, or perhaps simply a curmudgeon, who complained at hearing “inferior” music. The old postcard shown in Figure 5 shows a more upbeat set of passengers, delighted to have a busker approach and entertain them. Consider too the following account of busking on a train in 1884, where the third class passengers were more tolerant of the buskers:

*It may appear paradoxical to say that the London “Rough” is never at home unless he is out. Such is nevertheless the case; and in these days of railway enterprise and cheap fares, it would probably be difficult to find a better opportunity to study his manners and customs, and for seeing him at his best, than is afforded by a short train*

journey, in a third class carriage, on one of the lines that run through the metropolis. . . . One of the most noticeable peculiarities of the average "Bill" is his fondness for music, or its—to him—excellent substitute, musical noise, no matter in whatever shape it is presented; so, to satisfy this demand for talent there is generally some strolling musician in the train. When you have taken your seat you will probably find sitting next to you a gentleman with a cornet, who, directly the train has left the station, commences to blow "Home Sweet Home" or "The Death of Nelson," with variations, in the face of the unoffending and horror-stricken passenger opposite. If not a cornet player, then it is some other member of the musical profession, either a flautist, or a boy with a violin, or a woman with a cracked voice, who sings "Annie Lisle" and "The Minstrel Boy," and accompanies herself on the accordion, or maybe a young fellow with that delightful instrument the **German concertina**, or even a blind man who can play one or two heartrending tunes, in slow-time, on a tin whistle stuck in the spout of a coffee-pot. Any one of these, or even all of them at once, will suit our friend who is never slow to use his vocal powers to make up a concert. It almost invariably happens that there is some old gentleman in the carriage who strongly objects to the noise. He calls the guard, who is powerless in the matter when he finds that the offending performer has a ticket. Then is Bill's time for exercising that peculiar privilege of the true-born Briton, freedom of speech, and to indulge in a little "chaff." "Why don't yer ride on the roof, pal? There wouldn't be nothin' to 'urt yer feelin' s there." ... "P'r'aps some kind indiwidoal 'ull fetch Simis Reeves and Adlerliner Patti to sing a crusty ole gent orfe ter sleep." These and similar remarks generally compel the irate passenger to wish he had been born deaf or to come to the conclusion that the man who invented the **concertina** ought to have been hanged.<sup>24</sup>

Or consider this account of Londoners leaving for holidays at Liverpool station in 1902, where the concertina was part of the fun:

We find the holiday note dominant when we push our way through the seething crowd that fills Liverpool Street on a summer Saturday afternoon. Everywhere we come upon young people laughing and joking together. The young ladies are in their Sunday best, the young gentlemen have their hats rakishly set and display considerable daring in the colour of their neckties. Some are on cricket bent, others are anglers; there are tennis players, in fact, nearly every branch of, outdoor sport is represented on the platform. Then there are the hardworking boys and girls out for a mere holiday trip, and you can see that they mean to make the most of every minute. The moment they have stormed the train and packed themselves in their places, the sound of the **concertina** is heard, and the popular songs ring out loud and clear under the glass roof. They will sing till they reach their destination. If they return at night, they will sing all the way back. At midnight, as they make their way tired and sleepy out of the station into the silent streets of the City, they will still march to the uplifting strains of the **concertina** or the mouth-organ and sing. Sometimes they will dance, but that depends largely on the length of the journey and the atmospheric conditions.<sup>25</sup>

For many, however, the life of busking on the trains was one of desperation, and it bordered on begging, as was the case for an elderly man with disabilities who braved continuous fines and arrests to ply his trade on the trains in 1900:

At West Ham, Philip Righuth, itinerant musician, was summoned for traveling on the Great Eastern Railway without paying his ticket and with intent to avoid Payment. The defendant, an elderly man, is well-known on the suburban lines of the Great Eastern Railway, and is supposed to earn his living by collecting pence after playing a **concertina** in the carriages. . . . The defendant had been three times prosecuted and convicted for travelling without tickets. The defendant said that some days he spent 2s on railway fares, and that he did his best to amuse everyone. He was a cripple, and could not get a job as a

consequence. He was fined the full penalty of £5, including costs, or a month's imprisonment.<sup>26</sup>

Many who plied the trade of street entertainment sensed the fine line between begging and busking. Most buskers did not consider it begging, unlike their frequent critics in the press:

#### *Musician or Beggar?*

Before Mr. Hay Halkett, at Lambeth Police Court yesterday, A \_\_\_\_ G \_\_\_\_, 39, ship's carpenter, was charged with begging. It was stated that he was playing a *concertina* outside the Empress Music Hall, Brixton. When he was arrested, 6 pounds 7s 2 ½d was found on him. He said he was a teetotaler, and had been saving it. Mr. White, for the defense, said that the prisoner was a man of excellent character and was in continuous employment up to last December, but had lately been unable to get a ship. He did not think he was begging; he thought he was giving good value for money by playing the *concertina*. A constable told the magistrate that it was a beautiful instrument, and the prisoner played it very well. The Magistrate passed the nominal sentence of one day's imprisonment.<sup>27</sup>

The best professional street entertainers could make an appreciable middle class living by busking on the concertina, if they were talented and worked for long hours. The following account of an alimony case from the *Illustrated Police News* of London in 1897 shows in some detail how this busking was done, and just how lucrative it was. In this hearing, a former husband sought to have his weekly alimony reduced, allowing a full discussion of the economics of street busking at the time:

#### *The Woes of Street Musicians.*

##### *Professors on the Concertina.*

At Worship Street Police Court William Sunshine and Elizabeth Sunshine again had the story of the shadow on their domestic life before the court.

The wife about two years ago obtained an order of separation and maintenance against her husband. The after-proceedings have been by the wife to recover arrears of money due under her order, but the present case was in the nature of an application by summons against the wife to show cause why the weekly allowance of 10s. should not be reduced, the husband alleging that he was now in worse circumstances.

The husband (William Sunshine) went into the witness-box, and described himself as a street musician, and said that his average earnings were now as low as 15s. per week. At the time the order was made he admitted he earned 30s. or 35s. per week.

Mr. Hargetts: What do you play?

Sunshine, the husband: The *concertina*.

Mr. Titterton (chief clerk): Is that a "musical" instrument?

Sunshine (proudly): As I play it, yes.

Mr. Margetts: Why do you say you earn less now than you did two years ago?

Sunshine: There's so much opposition—piano organs and other things. We don't make half what we used. I've got plenty of evidence to prove that. Why, there's Mr. Whitton, one of the best harpists there is—on the streets—will tell you so; and Mr. Tomlin, who is on my lay, they'll come and tell you times is bad now.

Mr. Margetts: You have a regular round which you visit twice a day, haven't you?

Sunshine: Yes, that's it; but they ain't what they was; the County Council's done away with some of the streets and lots of the homes. There ain't no kids, and they don't want no music, and what there is to get the organ-grinder goes for, and I can't hold out with my *concertina* when the organ starts. I'm shut up, I am. (Loud laughter.)

Mr. Margetts: But your wife knows you have about thirty pitches a day, and go round twice?

Sunshine: Well, and if I get only a penny at each.

Mr. Margetts: Well, thirty pence is 2s 6d, and that twice a day is 5s, which is 30s a week, and we all know it is more.



*Sunshine: No, it ain't that; you hear my witnesses.*

Thomas Whitton, of Heneage Street, Bethnal Green, said he was a harpist.

*The Chief Clerk: Have you been long at it, Mr. Whitton?*

*The Witness (an old man): A matter of forty years, sir, I've been on the streets. One time we did very well; lately it is very bad.*

*Mr. Titterton: But not for the harp, Mr. Whitton?*

*The Witness: It does better than the **concertina**.*

*The Magistrate: This is certainly a proof of improved taste.*

James George Tomlin, a middle-aged man, was the husband's next witness. He described himself as a street musician.

*Mr. Titterton: What instrument?*

*The Witness: The **concertina**.*

*Mr. Titterton: The same instrument as Mr. Sunshine?*

*The Witness (with a tone of contempt for the legal clerk's ignorance): There are **concertinas** and **concertinas**. Mine is a different shape to Mr. Sunshine's. (Loud laughter.)*

*Well, what does your shaped **concertina** make a week?*

*I used to do very well. Now it is about 12s a week.*

*Mr. Margetts, addressing the magistrate for his wife, said he remembered the making of the order by Mr. Bushby, and the husband then told the same story about the decay of custom for his efforts, but told it with more pathos. The man was, in fact, better off now than two years ago, for he had then to pay for a child which had since ceased to be a charge upon him. The magistrate, without remark, said he should certainly not vary the order, and the amount would stand at 10s a week.<sup>28</sup>*

These amounts of a few shillings per week may not sound like much to modern ears, but in Victorian times they were worth considerably more. A currency converter at *The Concertina*

*Library*<sup>29</sup> converts nineteenth century British currency to equivalent amounts in the year 2000, taking account of both changes in the value of currency with time as well as changes in the real earnings rate (the amount of work needed to buy a product) to produce an estimate of currency equivalency across the time gap.<sup>30</sup> The man admitted earlier to earning as much as 35s. (thirty-five shillings) per week in 1897 currency. That amount is equivalent to £600 per week, or about £30,000 per year (approximately US \$52,000) in year 2000 currency, assuming continuous work on the part of the musician. Even considering that this concertina player may not have worked continuously (and hence that this annual amount is a bit of an overstatement), our Mr. Sunshine was earning a middle class income as a street entertainer.

A story in *The Musical Herald*, London, 1912, provides additional information on the income of street musicians at a time when such street busking was in decline:

*A London man who was penniless went out on a recent Sunday with a **concertina** to get money to pay his rent. After playing "Gentle Jesus" opposite the Oxford Music Hall he started to cross the road, and was killed by a motor omnibus. In his pockets was found 10s 6 ¼ d in coppers. The widow said he has no money when he left home, and always when he came home at night after being out playing, he had more than sufficient to pay the rent.<sup>31</sup>*

A conversion by the same method discussed above shows that the man had earned £150 pounds that day in year 2000 currency: not a bad return for a day's work. If that man, were he not to have been run over by that bus, had repeated that for 5 days a week, 50 weeks a year, he would have earned about £30,000 per year, approximately the same amount as his counterpart Mr. Sunshine two decades earlier.

A final financial calibration point for concertina busking is provided by this 1905 account in *The Nonconformist Musical Journal*, containing information on both a street singer and a concertina player:

*For those who are continually complaining of the inflictions of street music there is small consolation in the revelations which are made from time to time as to the earnings of organ-grinders, mechanical piano-men, and other itinerant representatives of the nuisance of noise. Last year it was brought out in the course of a case at Scarborough County Court, that a local "teacher of music," finding her occupation gone, like Othello's, had taken to singing in the streets, and had made over £8 in a fortnight. That, to be sure, was in the height of the visitor season; but £4 a week in the visitor season means at least twenty shillings a week when the season is "off." At Gateshead the other day the magistrates had before them an application by an ill-used wife for alimony under a separation order. The applicant said her husband was a street musician. He played the *concertina*, and he often had as much as 16 shillings for a day's work. She had known him to make £1 a day. These are no mythical statements.*<sup>32</sup>

The concertina player's "good day" of 16 shillings in 1905 is approximately equivalent to £250, in year 2000 currency.

Musicians like these, by and large, had money to invest in better-quality instruments, and typically would have used English-made Anglo-German instruments. For example, Sussex concertina player Scan Tester and Lancashire player Fred Kilroy, both of whom made considerable portions of their income in the early twentieth century by busking in streets and pubs, each owned several highest-quality Jeffries Anglos. When a middle-class income was on the line, high-quality instruments were the tools of the trade.

If the above income amounts seem a bit large, and if busking seems to have been outrageously more popular and profitable than that it is today, consider that the late nineteenth century boasted no television, no radio, and no cinema. Moreover, most "working poor" had insufficient funds for the opera or the symphony, or even for the music hall. Street performers took music to the people, and in most cases their efforts were appreciated—otherwise the music (and its underlying reason, money-collecting)

would stop. As the street girl is said to have mentioned (in Punch, see above):

*Oh, I'll lay you 'alf a tanner,  
you'll find it 'ard to beat  
The good old 'eaps of music  
that they gives us in our street.*

That is not to say that all was rosy. The next section looks at both the rougher and poorer edges of the street music trade, with an emphasis, of course, on concertina players.

### Street begging by children, the elderly, and the disabled

Although the best professional concertina-players could earn a modest middle-class income from their efforts, street life was much, much harder for others, and consisted of struggling for survival by any means, which frequently included musical begging. Consider this account from 1876:

#### *Death from Starvation in Newcastle*

*Last evening an inquest was held by Mr. J. T. Hoyle, coroner, at the Durham Ox Inn, on the body of Isabella Burdiss, 39 years of age. The sister of the deceased stated that the latter had lived for some time past with a man named George Ridley, in the Fourth Banks, that they were very badly off, and that Ridley had nothing to support himself, except what he got by going about playing a *concertina*. . . . They never had any butcher's meat; and the other day she [the sister] went to see the relieving officer to get an order for the workhouse. . . . [H]e refused to give her an order, and told her to go away. On Sunday morning last, about half-past nine, he [the witness] went to the deceased, [and] . . . found that she was dead. . . . The doctor deposed that the deceased was a perfect skeleton, and . . . thought that she had died from starvation. He examined the place, and there was not a scrap of food in it. The deceased and the bed were in a most filthy condition. The jury returned a verdict to the effect that her death had been accelerated*

by want of proper food, clothing, and nourishment.<sup>33</sup>

Even a high quality professional musician or composer, faced with increasing age or disability, or even with the changing tastes of a fickle public, could find himself or herself in desperate straits, as the sad case of Tom Maguire from 1907 shows:

#### *Composer's Sad Plight*

The spectacle of a popular song writer fallen upon evil days produced a pathetic impression at Bow street Police Court (London) yesterday afternoon. A blind composer, Tom Maguire, was, with his wife Frances, charged with causing an obstruction. He was well known years ago, and he has written many songs which have secured a great deal of popularity, including these sentimental ballads, "Spare the old mud Cabin", "Kathleen Ashore", "Wait Till the Clouds Roll By", and others with a humorous note, but poverty and affliction overtook him, and now, absolutely blind and nearly stone deaf, he lives in Clerkenwell, and goes into the streets trying to sell his melodies. Mrs. Maguire, a neatly-dressed little woman in black, had to lead her husband carefully into the dock. A zealous constable on the previous evening saw Maguire playing a *concertina* on the pavement in Russell street. He stopped this, but later Maguire and his wife were on the pavement again selling song books. They were arrested. A number of songs were handed to the magistrate, Sir Albert De Rutzen, which Maguire proudly acknowledged having written twenty years ago. "I was very famous then," he added, "but now I'm in the gutter." He further stated that if he only had a decent instrument he could probably get his living on the music halls. Maguire and his wife were discharged, and the old composer was led gently out of court.<sup>34</sup>

The reach of Maguire's songs was long. Figure 6 shows an editorial cartoon of 1887 that mocked Prime Minister Gladstone's colonial troubles by showing him, with concertina, playing Maguire's *Wait Till the Clouds Roll By*.

This cartoon was published twenty years before the composer appeared in court.



"WAIT TILL THE CLOUDS ROLL BY!"

Figure 6. An 1887 drawing from *Punch* pokes fun at Prime Minister Gladstone's colonial troubles, by invoking a popular music hall tune of the day. The concertina player and composer who wrote that tune, Tom Maguire, would be arrested for street begging in London twenty years later.

Concertina playing and the singing of hymns were popular ways for people who were blind or had other disabilities to eke out a living (Figure 7); the following account is from London in 1871:

The blind singers, who with the assistance of a *concertina* ply through the whole of London, are known to every one. They render their psalm tunes, soundly harmonized, in a hard *canto fermo* style, which has its legitimate attractions, and with that peculiar concentration and directness of purpose which characterizes blind people, and which has a pathos of its own. We fancy that regular bands of accomplished part-singers are less common now than they were a few years ago. They may have been driven out of the field

by the negro melodists, and have no doubt found a more congenial sphere in the various music-halls which have lately been opened in great numbers all over the country.<sup>35</sup>



Figure 7. Blind concertina-player Joe Blackburn and his wife, London, ca. 1890. From the collection of Stephen Chambers.

A novel of 1894 paints a more detailed portrait of one of these blind, concertina-playing beggars:

*This is the brief history of a part of the life of an East End street-singer and instrumentalist. It tells of no sudden recognition of genius and its consequent exhibition in the glare of royally patronised opera-houses. For Providence had not only withheld from Eliza Begg the divine spark of genius, but had prevented her from coming under the influence of even its dimmest ray. 'Liza's instrument, too, was one rarely affected by musicians. It was a German*

*concertina, which at its best is bad, and in her hands was worse. All those charitably disposed persons who dropped coppers into the cup suspended from her neck and attached to the metal plate which told the world she was "Blind," did so purely from pity, and would prefer that she would play before the homes of her enemies.*<sup>36</sup>

Where there is pathos, and charitable money to be had, one can assume that an enterprising blind performer will hone his art to economic, if not artistic, perfection. Consider the case of the London character "Crying Harry," from 1896 (also see Figure 8):

*"Crying Harry" is a long, lean, anatomy of a man of some sixty summers—or winters, rather—who discourses sweet music—Moody and Sanky's [hymns]—from the brazen bowels of a German concertina to the occasional accompaniment of his diminutive dog Fidey, but more often to that of his own less melodious lungs. His hymns are invariably rendered with the most approved unction, what time the tears may be seen to flow copiously from his great sightless orbs down a pair of cadaverous cheeks, presenting a picture at once impressive and irresistible. Woe betide the tender-hearted old lady who chances to cross Harry's path when he is in his melting mood. Fresh from her cozy cottage, with the memory of perhaps a dozen sturdy vagabonds rankling in her breast, she may screw her mouth a little tighter, and step out with unwonted firmness as the form of a vocalist comes in sight, and the air becomes charged with his pious strain; but be her heart never so steeled against charity, she cannot pass him. There is about Harry a mysterious influence that no sympathetic old lady—and all old ladies are sympathetic—can resist, a magnetic attraction that no coin of the realm below the caliber of a shilling can treat with impunity. The diminutive three-penny piece may presume upon its insignificance, or its universally acknowledged utility in the matter of Sunday collections, and hide itself in the remotest corner of purse or pocket; but it knows not the man with whom it*

has to deal when Harry is about. . . . The tears will begin to flow as if by magic, additional unction is imparted to the pious strain, and the old lady capitulates gracefully. . . . Harry's facility for divining the approach of sympathetic old ladies is nothing less than marvelous.<sup>37</sup>



Figure 8. Blind concertina-player with dog and tapping stick. This photograph is somewhat evocative of the London character "Crying Harry" (see text).

As any reader of Charles Dickens will know, the unhappy spectacle of children begging in the street was particularly common in Victorian England. In addition to street orphans, some children were placed on the street by their parents to generate income, and still others were victims of a well-organized child slavery trade. Consider first the latter, in the form of Italian children:

*The saddest aspect of this question of Italian immigration is the traffic in Italian children,*

*which has been for so long carried out in this country under the auspices of the padroni, and which continues to flourish despite all the efforts which have been made to check it. "Child-slavery in England" it has been called; and certainly the condition of these poor children is in many respects little better than that of slaves. The children are brought over from Italy by men who obtain them from their parents upon payment of a very small sum . . . and upon undertaking to clothe and feed them. The parents who thus dispose of their children are for the most part poor peasants living in Calabria, and the south of Italy.*

*The children are imported here simply for the purpose of following one or the other of the vagrant professions in the streets of London and throughout the country. They are sent out early in the morning with an accordion, **concertina**, or other instrument, and told to sing or play before houses, and the to wait for money. As a rule, they do not openly beg for alms, as this would bring them within the reach of the law, but they just stand and wait, and benevolent persons . . . are moved to compassion.*<sup>38</sup>

Joe Morley (1867-1937), one of the finest classical banjo-players of England in the early twentieth century, started his musical career at the age of five in 1872 as a child street-busker, with his concertina-playing father:

*Mr. Morley, Joe's father, appears to have earned his early living by playing the **concertina** in the streets (a professional busker!); and when Joe was about five years of age, he was accompanying his father on his itinerant excursions. There is concrete evidence that the Morleys (father and son) were performing outside public houses at Salisbury, Wilts. in the year 1872. The little boy was dressed in jacket and knickerbockers, with stockings encircled by red and black bands, and he step-danced to his father's tunes. After performing, the Morleys would take a collection ("bottling," as it is known in busking circles) and then move on to the next "pitch."*<sup>39</sup>

# "SAFE IN THE ARMS OF JESUS."

(22 KEYS.)



Figure 9. A hymn of the sort favored by blind street players, guaranteed to coax a few copper coins from a sympathetic listener. From *How to Learn the Chromatic Anglo-German Concertina*, C. Roylance, London, 1878.

Perhaps the most plaintive, if a bit maudlin, account of child begging with concertina is that of a crippled boy who plied his trade on the Liverpool ferry boats, in 1861:

*Wings some day*

*Passengers on board one of the many ferryboats that are constantly plying between the opposite shores of the Mersey, may occasionally see, on warm, bright days, a poor crippled boy, whose body has grown to almost a man's size, but whose limbs, withered and helpless, are still those of a child.*

*He wheels himself about on a small carriage, similar to that the boys use in play; and while the little boat threads its way among the ships of all nations that are anchored in the river, he adds not a little to the pleasure of the sail, by playing on his "Concertina," airs that show no mean degree of musical skill. The few pennies that he*

*always receives, but does not ask for, are never grudgingly bestowed, and are given not more in pay for the music, than for the simple honesty which shines in the boy's blue eyes.*

*One so helpless, it would seem, could only be a burden to those who loved him—could certainly do nothing toward fulfilling the command—"Bear ye one another's burdens;" was it so? Was there no service of love for the lame boy? No work for him in the vineyard? The question was answered one day.*

*"Walter," said a gentleman who had often met him, "how is it, when you cannot walk, that your shoes always get worn out?"*

*A blush came over the boy's pale face, but after hesitating a moment he said:*

*"My mother has younger children, sir, and while she is out washing, I amuse them by creeping about the floor, and playing with them.*

*"Poor boy!" said a lady standing near, not loud enough, as she thought, to be over heard, "what*

*a life to lead! What has he in the future to look forward to?"*

*The tear started in his eye, and the bright smile that chased it away, showed that he did hear her. As she passed by him to step on shore, he said in a low voice, but with a smile that went to her heart—"I'm looking forward to having wings, some day, lady!"*

*Happy Walter! Poor, crippled, and dependent on charity, yet doing, in his measure, the Master's will, patiently waiting for the future, he shall, by-and-by "mount up with wings as eagles, shall run and be not weary, shall walk and not faint."*<sup>40</sup>



Figure 10. Blind musician with German or Anglo-German concertina. From the collection of Chris Algar, Barleycorn Concertinas.



Figure 11. *The Concertina Player at Trafalgar Square*, by Eyre Crowe, 1902. The painting depicts Jacob Oxford, who was crippled and afflicted with dwarfism. He busked with his concertina in Trafalgar Square in the late 1800s. From *Royal Academy Pictures*, 1902, p. 107.

## The Cockney in the late Victorian street parade



Figure 12. Fictional East London Cockney with concertina, from Jerome K. Jerome and Robert Barr, 1893, *The Idler*.

For all the struggle and pathos of the displaced and impoverished on the streets of early Victorian London, a new sort of city and populace began emerging during the late nineteenth century, when unprecedented numbers of urban working people began to enjoy a bit of leisure time and a bit of extra pocket money to purchase new, inexpensive mass-produced consumer products like the concertina. Newer generations of working- and middle-class Londoners, many the children of parents who had immigrated to London from elsewhere in Britain (or abroad), forged more stable lives that began to more closely resemble our lives today. The London Cockneys were among those who enthusiastically embraced the concertina. Many of these Cockneys were sons and daughters of the rural exodus, as this passage from Jerry White's history of *London in the Nineteenth Century* makes clear:



OUT OF TOWN.  
(UNFASHIONABLE INTELLIGENCE.)

Visitor, "WHAT A ROARING TRADE THE HOTELS WILL BE DOING, WITH ALL THESE HOLIDAY FOLK!"  
Host Walter at The George, "LOR BLESS YER, SIR, NO! THEY ALL BRING THEIR NOSRAGS WITH 'EM!"

Figure 13. Street scene with concertina, and a caustic comment from the cartoonist. Working and middle class Victorians proudly carried German and Anglo-German concertinas with them as they socialized outdoors. From *Punch*, 1888, with thanks to Wes Williams.

Arthur Harding—none more Cockney than he, the "terror" of Bethnal Green in the first years of the twentieth century—was born in the Old Nichol Street area in 1886. His mother had come to London from Norfolk some thirty years before, moving to Hoxton as a rag picker around 1875. His father was a Londoner well enough, born in Pearl Street, Spitalfields—but of Cornish stock, his family migrating probably at mid-century or just before. This pattern was typical. The London-born had generally one or both parents born elsewhere.<sup>41</sup>

This newer urban generation saw steadily improving, more stable lives than their immigrant "rag-picker" parents had, and began to enjoy somewhat more leisure time. Working- and middle-class people in nineteenth-century cities

lived in small, rather crowded dwellings, and sought any chance they could to socialize out-of-doors, weather permitting. In those days before recorded music and battery-powered boom boxes, they brought their music with them into the streets and parklands. Manufactured, mass-produced concertinas, accordions, fiddles, et cetera, mostly from German factories, brought such instruments well within their purchasing power, and owning one was one symbol of growing wealth and status, on however small a scale. Many proudly paraded on the streets carrying them, as Figure 13 (from a cartoon in *Punch* in 1888) shows.

In the literature of the era, a stereotypical Cockney couple, " 'Arry and 'Arriet," appears. Meet 'Arry (Figure 14), an unabashedly cheerful



and fiercely proud east Londoner of 1885, as seen by the London magazine *Fun*:



Figure 14. 'Arry with concertina at Southend, a late Victorian working class seaside resort. From *Fun*, London, 1885.

*Songs of the Watering Places*  
No. 1—Southend.

*Of Southend with pleasure I will sing—  
More, doubtless, than some will find there  
Who've had the misfortune to bring  
Stiff manners from Grosvenor Square:  
This three-shilling joy of the East—  
Of London's East-enders, I mean—  
Is, though not greatest, not least  
Of fair outing-places, I ween.*

*The tides there run out twice a day,  
The same as the tides elsewhere do,  
But elsewhere they do not display  
Of mudfields so perfect a view.  
The pier, which pursues the white foam  
Some mile and a quarter from land,  
Gives sight of the winkles at home  
And fat mussel ready at hand.  
O, all ye who're "stuck up" and proud,  
To Southend for pleasure don't go;  
Society's there free and loud,  
And sure to impress you as low:  
Most likely you'd find 'Arry there,  
Chaff, gay concertina and all,  
And 'tish'n't "a 'aughty swell's stare"  
Will ever make 'Arry sing small. ....*

Southend was a favorite day excursion by train for East Londoners on a Whit Monday, as this 1901 account attests:

*[A]t Southend he will find all the delights that endear the seaside to him; there is the tea with shrimps—countless shrimps, quarts and gallons of shrimps; he is among his own kind; there is no one to scoff when, to the music of his concertina, he takes out his companion to dance in the road; he sings his music-hall ditties unchecked; he bawls the cry of the day, and it is counted unto him for infinite humor.<sup>42</sup>*

Harry could also be found on an Easter Sunday with his concertina and his girlfriend at Hampstead Heath (Figure 15), where couples "dance in the grass to the inspiring strains of a concertina."<sup>43</sup> Londoners flocked to the parks of their day, and most of those parks (like Hampstead Heath) were relatively new in 1872, when the following was written:



Figure 15. "'Arry and 'Arriet" spending leisure time with a concertina at Hampstead Heath, London. Note the expression of intense concentration on the face of the player, and the bemused expression of his partner. From Walter Besant's *East London*, 1901.



Figure 16. Concertinist playing for dancers on a bank holiday weekend at Knockholt, 1905. From Charles Harper, *The Hastings Road*, 1906.

With very few exceptions, the 57,000 people who yesterday spent their (Whit Monday) holiday at the Crystal Palace were exceedingly well-behaved. Probably by far the larger part (of the visitors) wisely passed the day in the grounds, enjoying the fresh country air and finding recreation, some in dancing under the trees, if even a squeaky *concertina*, a fiddle, or a flageolet could be found to provide what could be called music only by a stretch of courtesy.<sup>44</sup>

Another favored park was the grove of beeches at Knockholt, along the old Hastings Road (Figure 16):

*Whether it be due to strong liquors of the "Crown" (pub) or to the bracing quality of the breezes I do not know, but the sheer abandonment of the merry-making at the Beeches can excel even that of the (Hampstead) 'Eath on a Bank Holiday. . . . From Knockholt Beeches the eye ranges to the Crystal Palace . . . and the Tower Bridge. . . . But those familiar objects soon pall, and the yearful music of the *concertina* and the mazy dance commonly occupy the all too swiftly fading afternoon.*<sup>45</sup>

On entering a park in Greenwich on a holiday Easter morning in 1868, an observer noted that:

*[I]t becomes evident that "On with the dance, let joy be unconfined," is the animating principle of action among the assembled thousands of smiling, happy-looking holiday-makers. "The efficient quadrille bands," *concertina*-players, and even organ-grinders, are fully employed in discouraging dance-music to large parties, whose*

*dancing, if not particularly graceful, is at any rate energetic and joyous, and contrasts favourably with the funeral-like manner in which dances are "walked through" in fashionable society. . . . In connection with the proceedings of the dancing section of the holiday-makers, it is satisfactory to notice that they are very liberal in "paying the piper." At the end of each dance each male dancer gives the band a penny, and as from thirty to forty couples generally stand up to dance, the "musicians" make a pretty good thing out of an Easter Monday holiday.*<sup>46</sup>

Yet another such holiday place was Rosherville Gardens, near the shipyards at Gravesend. Once a place for polite society, by the 1880s it was taken over by Cockneys from East London (Figure 17), something that was not appreciated by old-line, more aristocratic Londoners, who would sniff that:

*[I]n the society of ladies who wear white aprons, mauve dresses, and hats with very fine and large ostrich feathers, and in the company of gentlemen with "pearlies" and concertinas the happiness must be perfectly and beautifully delirious. But if you like other society, and less of it, you go elsewhere. . . . The Roshervillians of Rosher's day knew nothing of Bank Holidays.*

*They were, if not exactly to be described as prim and decorous in themselves, dull and intensely respectable by comparison with those who frequent the Gardens in these times. . . . [they] would look with horror and disgust on the boys and girls, the young men and women, who, with concertinas and mouth-organs, make day detestable and night hideous with "All in a Row."*<sup>47</sup>

Step aside, Elvis. The roots of modern rock 'n' roll culture and generational conflict extend at least as far back as Victorian East London!



Figure 17. Cockney couple at Rosherville Gardens. From Charles Harper, 1895, *The Dover Road*.

For sheer exuberance, however, it would be hard to beat the scene on Derby Day at Epsom Downs:

*The Derby is the greatest purely racing affair of the English turf. Since 1820, Derby Day has been a universal holiday, and the panorama on Epsom Downs is a spectacle of varied throngs. Not infrequently, indeed, the assemblage comprises from one to two hundred thousand people, drawn from all parts of Great Britain. . . . The grounds are entirely free, which may account for the immense and motley throngs that completely pre-*

*empt every inch of space. . . . There is no band of musicians with their stirring strains, and the wandering minstrels, with guitar and concertinas, only serve to make the noise more unendurable and to fill the air with lugubrious echoes.*<sup>48</sup>

For all the pageant of the crowds and the horse race itself, there is the added attraction of the second race: to home, on crowded streets, at the end of the day. Here we can follow the action with an illustration of a slightly inebriated Cockney concertina-player on the back of a horse-drawn wagon, with two lively lady friends seated nearby (Figure 18). A slightly puzzled American of the period observed:

*When it is all over there is the desperate hurry of departure, the harnessing up of frightened horses, and the collecting of stray members of the different coaching parties, and a great blowing of horns and cracking of whips, and much inelegant language . . . while the great mob that arrived at different hours tries to get out at the same moment. But as soon as the downs are cleared . . . there is much more singing and much more blowing of horns and playing of accordions and airy persiflage. . . . From the downs to High Street, Whitechapel, there is one continual burst of song.*<sup>49</sup>

The clothing of these holiday-making Cockneys has been touched upon in above clippings—the ostrich feathers worn in women's hats, and the "pearlies" of the men: suits with dark lapels, adorned with large pearl buttons in extravagant numbers. Figures 15, 17, and especially 18 show good examples. Their fashions, along with the Anglo concertinas that were played, show a propensity toward a certain brash showiness that had been perhaps more subdued in previous, less prosperous generations.

In the streets on non-holiday evenings, concertinas were frequently used by festive spirits (Figure 21)—not always to the delight of nearby residents, as the following four observations from 1869, 1890, 1894, and 1897, respectively, show:



Figure 18. 'Returning from the Derby,' from Richard Harding Davis, 1890, *Our English Cousins*.

Figure 19. Nocturnal serenader, England, 1896. From the collection of Stephen Chambers.



Figure 20. Street musician with German concertina, outside a London pub. From *The Sunday Magazine*, 1874.





Figure 21. Carousers parading the streets, with concertina and banjo. From Jerome K. Jerome and Robert Barr, 1893, *The Idler*.

At any hour of the night a fool in love with a *concertina* may disturb a whole neighborhood with the noise he pleases to think music; and no interruption is given to any number of drunken rollickers who choose to sing and holloa up and down our streets and squares.<sup>50</sup>

The organ-grinder is an old nuisance . . . but not so easily routed are the fiends who parade the street after closure of the public houses, chanting and playing (save the mark!) on the *concertina* the airs they have heard at the neighboring music-hall. Hardly a night passes in my house without such a disturbance of either work or rest.<sup>51</sup>

If you have ever lodged in the East End of London or in the working class district of a provisional town, as I have, you will know that a *concertina* player is a host in himself, and as he serenades you from the street below on his nightly peregrinations, you must wonder why he does not go to Italy, as the Italians come here, and turn professional.<sup>52</sup>

There is another terror beloved of a certain type of cockney, and it is never, by any chance, rampant in the daytime. A young coster, having

finished his labour, and completed the joyous rite of "jumping on his mother,"<sup>53</sup> marches through the streets squeezing the air from a *concertina*. He is accompanied by a group of admiring friends, never less than six in number. They march heavily, these gallant Britons. You hear their boot heels keeping time to the shrill instrument. Now and then they whistle a chorus. More frequently they yell it. Where they march from, and where they march to, no man knoweth. I know only that their nightly processions torture my ears.<sup>54</sup>

To have such an abundance of street concertinas they had to have been easy to obtain, and they were (see Chapter 1). The desire of the general public for concertinas enabled one wily Cockney to devise a street game to snag a few coppers, in 1890:

All sorts of funny amusements are indulged in in many parts of that unknown land, the East End of London. Not long ago I was passing down a busy thoroughfare on a Saturday night, when I saw a vacant piece of land occupied by an extremely witty costermonger, who had rigged up an arrangement consisting of a large cross bar, from which were suspended 14 or 15 strings, at the end of each of which was a very sticky, streaky-coloured halfpenny roll.

It was a sort of prize competition, and the costermonger offered a pound of shag, or a *concertina*, or a very "nobby" new hat and coat, among other prizes, to those who succeeded in eating one of the rolls with their hands tied behind their backs. It looked easy enough, and there was quite a crowd of competitors. They paid one penny each, but though I stood there nearly a quarter of an hour only one person succeeded in biting a roll, and he looked

remarkably like a confederate who had practised diligently before.

*Every now and then the costermonger smeared the rolls afresh with treacle. He provided each competitor with a sort of smock in order to preserve his clothes. It was one of the funniest things I ever saw, and the crowd laughed itself into fits as each confident young fellow went up, only to find himself smeared all over with the sticky delicacy.<sup>55</sup>*

## Holidays and excursions

Opportunities for music and merrymaking also included traveling on a holiday coach. By the last decades of the nineteenth century, such conveyances were no longer the norm for daily travel, and passengers looked upon such trips as nostalgic exercises, regarding a concertina player or perhaps another musician as a necessary and welcome addition to the party (see Figure 22; the concertina player is at the center of the front row). An illustrator has tried to capture this nostalgic spirit in a drawing of an imagined coach scene set in the early 1800s (Figure 23). Its intended period is too early for the hexagonal German concertina shown, but nonetheless the concertina's presence in the drawing is an indication that it was seen as an ordinary accompaniment for such holiday outings.

One holiday place farther afield where low income, working class Victorians went each year was to the hop fields of Kent:

*A curious though passing phase of the Night Side of London is to be seen towards the end of August, when the hop-picking season begins—the time when a vast army of East Enders take their annual holiday. Every year thousands of men, women, and children from Whitechapel and Southwark make their way from the great city into the pleasant land of Kent, where the ripe hops, in long lanes of green and gold, stand waiting for the hand of the picker.<sup>56</sup>*

This “working man’s holiday” offered hops-picking for pay during the day, with holiday

dances and pub merriment each evening. One Sussex musician who followed the hop season each year in the last decades before World War I was the well-known concertina player Scan Tester:

*My eldest brother and me, we used to take our concertinas and go up to the hop country, and we used to go in the pub with our concertinas of a night, and go hop-picking during the day. Never used to draw no hop-picking money, not before we come home. We used to earn our living in the pubs. . . . Oh, we had several pounds to bring home. Oh yes, that wasn’t no bother at all. We used to go to a little place called Iden Green, and it was close to Benenden. About a mile from there is a little place called the Oak. We used to go up there. They’d got a landlord wanted us to go there of a Saturday night. The weekend we used to get the place full up with hoppers. My brother was a stepdancer and all, and we would take turns. One would dance and the other would play. I’ve had some happy times up there.<sup>57</sup>*

The music and frivolity, as always in Victorian times, spread out to the street, as the following account from 1902 (and Figure 24) shows:

*There is a special attraction . . . in front of one of the pubs, and like many of the hoppers we stand and “take it in.” A couple of hoppers are dancing on a narrow strip of pavement to the inspiring strains of a wheezy concertina played by another hopper; the pair are encompassed by spectators, who shout words of encouragement and approval. The lady of the pair is a “fine, upstanding wench,” a by no means bad-looking “gel.” She is dressed rather better than the majority of the other young women about, and sports a new, blue blouse. She dances with a certain amount of rough gracefulness, and with amazing vigour. Her black eyes are snapping fires. Every line of her betokens enjoyment. See how her body sways to the unmusical music. She is having a good time, you bet. Her partner is a young man of her own class—perhaps he is her*



Figure 22. A holiday party poses in front of an old horse-drawn coach, late nineteenth century. Note the concertina player, near the middle of the front row. From the collection of Stephen Chambers.



Figure 23. Drawing of a nineteenth century coaching scene, produced in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Note concertinist on top of coach. From the collection of Stephen Chambers.

young man, perhaps not; but subsequent events seem to support the former conjecture. The young man wears somewhat of a sheepish look as he foots it a trifle awkwardly on the kerb, but 'Lizerunt,' or whatever the young woman's name is, looks at him with a keenly resentful glance if he shows any sign of stopping.<sup>58</sup>



Figure 24. Hoppers dancing in the streets, to the music of a concertina. From Robert Machray, *The Night Side of London*, 1902.

By the end of the century, the German system concertina, in either its German or Anglo-German form, was synonymous with good times and holiday music in the eyes of most working-class and middle-class urbanites, as Figures 26 and 27 suggest. Before taking our leave of street music, we should examine one particular type of music that drew heavy participation from Victorian concertina players in city streets, music halls, and rural countryside—the global minstrel craze, imported from America.

## The concertina in the minstrel craze

One of the more prominent roles for German and Anglo-German concertinas in Victorian England was in blackface minstrelsy. Of all the uses of the concertina during its heyday, this seems to be the one least remembered today even though minstrel groups of English origin were active in English streets, in Music Halls, and even on television for well over a century. The minstrel shows, which originated in America, were extraordinarily popular not only in Britain, but throughout her colonies and all across Europe as well. At its lowest level, blackface minstrelsy mimicked and ridiculed the skin color, speech, dance and customs of enslaved Africans in the American south. Its zenith of popularity in America and Europe came at the same time that European powers were carving up the African continent for the glory of their various nations. There is no denying the ugly racism of the era. On the positive side, however, the dance music of minstrelsy represented a multi-racial breakthrough that accounted for much of its global popularity.

**Origins.** Perhaps the first of the global waves of popular music to emanate from America, the minstrel phenomenon, like the musical forms that later followed it—ragtime, jazz, rhythm and blues, rock 'n' roll, and hip-hop—originated in large part from the fusion of the European melodic tradition with African rhythms. In the American colonies, black fiddle and banjo playing was common as far back as the late seventeenth century. Nicholas Cresswell, an Englishman traveling through the American colonies in the years immediately before the American Revolution, attended a barbecue in rural Maryland in 1774 where:

*A great number of young people met together with a Fiddle and Banjo played by two Negroes, with Plenty of Toddy...I believe they have danced and drunk till there are few sober people among them.*<sup>59</sup>



# THE "INVINCIBLE" HORNPIPE.



Figure 25. A step-dancing tune from *The Anglo-German Concertina Player's Companion*, C. Roylance, London, 1889.

Figure 26. Early twentieth century gentlemen's outing; note the carefully positioned Anglo-German concertina at center. From the collection of Stephen Chambers.



Figure 27. Another gentlemen's outing, late nineteenth century. From the collection of Stephen Chambers.

The practice of having black slaves playing for white dances was common, and led to the cross-fertilization of music and dance. Cresswell attended a ball the following year where:

*Here was about 37 ladies dressed and powdered to the life...All of them fond of dancing...Betwixt the Country dances they have what I call everlasting jigs. A couple gets up and begins to dance a jig (to some Negro tune) others comes and cuts them out, and these dances always last as long as the Fiddler can play.<sup>60</sup>*

Unsurprisingly, the playing of European dance music by African musicians had a profound effect on regional music in the South, as Joyce Caughen noted in a recent study of Alabama fiddle music:

*It was in the slave quarters, during Saturday night frolics, weddings, and Christmas dances, that southern fiddling gained much of its characteristic drive, the "hoedown" quality that differentiates it from the fiddle styles of New England and the British Isles. Accustomed to more complex and varied rhythms than those he heard in British music, the African fiddler may have found the new music "childishly simple." He played sedate tunes for his master's cotillions, then added bow shuffles and syncopations to the same tunes to power the rhythmic, emotional, leaping, handclapping dances of the slaves.<sup>61</sup>*

As American music scholar Alan Jabbour has noted, old-time fiddle and banjo music in the southern United States owes its unique shuffling, syncopated rhythm and drive to that of black banjo and fiddle players during and after the slavery era.<sup>62</sup> Northern white entertainers quickly saw the commercial potential of it. They added mask-like face blackening with burnt cork to a new variety show format that combined the wild strains of "authentic Ethiopian" music and dance with racially stereotypical humor. The first of these "minstrel shows" was held in New York City in 1843, with the *Virginia Minstrels*, led by Ohio-born Dan Emmett (1815-1904). Their act consisted of a mixture of songs, dance tunes, and

ribald humor. By 1845 a new group, billing itself as the *Ethiopian Serenaders*, toned down the more bawdy aspects and added concert-like performances of sentimental tunes—Stephen Foster's melodies, for example—in essence creating an early variety show, albeit in blackface.

**In England.** Performing in this highly successful format, the Ethiopian Serenaders travelled to England in 1846. To European ears, their wildly syncopated music and its extravagant instrumentation, with banjos, bones, tambourines and the like, was new and exhilarating. They were a smash hit at the St. James's Hall (Figure 28), as later were the *Christy Minstrels* in 1857. Also in the 1840s, Virginia blackface banjo player Joe Sweeney extensively toured England, Scotland, and Ireland, planting the seeds for the popular use of the banjo there.



Figure 28. The Ethiopian Serenaders at the time of their visit to London, 1847. Note musician with flutina, second from right. From "Daddy" Rice, *The Monarchs of Minstrelsy*, 1911.

St. James's Hall became the most prominent home for English minstrelsy, and hosted a continuous, unbroken string of minstrel shows from 1862 to 1904, with the *Christy Minstrels* and the home-brewed *Moore and Burgess Minstrels* as house bands. The *Christy Minstrels* became so popular there that their name became a generic term for any roaming blackface troupe in Britain and its colonies. These shows took place in the basement of the building, and more than once their "wild strains" came up through

the floorboards of the first floor concert hall, disrupting more proper classical and operatic performances. Lady Henschel reported in her autobiography that she and her daughter went to hear the famous violinist Joseph Joachim play at a Saturday "Pop," but were so aware of the "rhythmic gay sounds, thumping and shimmering away in a most enlivening manner" and emanating from the floorboards, that they decided to go downstairs and hear Moore and Burgess instead.<sup>63</sup>

The electrifying performances of the Ethiopian Serenaders led immediately to a host of imitators among English street and music-hall musicians. Mayhew interviewed two of them in London in 1854:

*"It must be eight years ago," he commenced, "since the Ethiopian serenading came up—aye it must be at least that time, because the twopenny boats was then running to London-bridge. . . . The first [the Ethiopian Serenaders] came out at St. James's theatre, and they made a deal of money. . . . As soon as I could get in to vamp the tunes on the banjo a little, I went at it too. I wasn't long behind them, you may take your oath. We judged it would be a hit, and it was fine. We got more money at it than we do at any game, now. . . . We'd black our faces, and get hold of a white hat, and put a black band around it, or have big straw hats and high collars up to the ears. . . . The boys would follow us for miles and were as good as advertisements, for they'd shout, 'Here's the blacks!' as if they were trumpeting us. The first songs we come out with were 'Old Joe,' 'Dan Tucker,' and 'Going ober de Mountain' and 'O come along, you sandy boys.'"*

Another blackface performer, who generally played in the street, stated in the 1850s that:

*Last year was the best year I've known. . . . The evenings are the best time. Regent Street and Oxford Street and the greater part of St. James's are our best places. The gentry are our best customers, but we get more from gentlemen than from the ladies. . . . We can average £1 a-piece*

*now in the week (per group), but it's summertime, and we can't make that in bad weather. Then there's so many of us. There's the Somer's-town mob now in London; the King-street, the four St. Giles's mobs, the East-end (but they're white n---rs), the two Westminster mobs, the Marylebone, and the Whitechapel. We interfere with one another's beats sometimes, for we have no arrangement with one another, only we don't pitch near the others when they're at work. The ten mobs now in London will have 50 men in them at least, and they're plenty of stragglers who are not regular n---rs.*

*[W]e're more of a poorer sort, if not to say a ragged sort, for some are without shoes or stockings. The "n---rs" that I know have been errand boys, street-singers, turf-cutters, coalheavers, chandlers, paviours, mud-larks, tailors, shoemakers, tinmen, bricklayers' labourers, and people who have no line in particular but their wits."*<sup>64</sup>



Figure 29. Strolling blackface minstrels, probably in Greenwich England, ca 1884. From the collection of Rod Stradling, House of Musical Traditions.

**The concertina and the minstrels.** If this sounds like a type of enterprise that might fit the German concertina, it certainly was. Although the early big-name visiting troupes from America that kicked off the craze had no concertinas—the Ethiopian Serenaders used a flutina, an early accordion-like instrument from their start in

1845; see Figure 28—the popularity of the German concertina among working-class folk in England made it a natural, and performers soon learned that the concertina, like the banjo, could excel at the jaunty, brash rhythm of this new music. Charles Dickens wrote of one fictitious concertina-playing performer in his journal *All the Year Round* in 1864. Dickens had his character say:

*[I]t is about five-and-twenty years since I first took to the darkey business. I was a bit of a boy then, and did Jim Crow all over the country. . . . I began with the bones; rose rapidly, owing to my native genius, to the tambourine, advanced with giant strides to the banjo, and at last attained to the proud eminence of the **concertina**.*

*[I]n my line of work you can't choose your hours, and you can't choose your district. On Lord Mayor's Day you may earn enough for a week in an hour or two, up a court about the Old Bailey, when the people are waiting to see the procession. But then every day of the year ain't the ninth of November. As a rule, there's nothing to be done in the n---r line until after dinner. . . . I fancy that the more people have to drink, the better they like our performance. And so it is, sir that our best time is at night, about an hour before the public houses-close. . . . Well, I used to do a very good night business with our troupe, of which, being the **concertina**, I was the head and director, a very good business, sir.*<sup>65</sup>

By 1865, prolific Glasgow music publisher J.S. Marr was offering *Christy Minstrel Songs for the Concertina*, priced at 6d. (sixpence). Nearly every concertina tutor for the second half of the nineteenth century served generous helpings of minstrel tunes (e. g., Figure 30), including most of the works by Stephen Foster and lively dance tunes by minstrel composers like Dan Emmett and Frank Livingston. These tunes were hits in even some of the farthest-flung posts of the Empire, as Prince Albert was to see on a visit to India. While he was observing a horsemanship match with the 15<sup>th</sup> Hussars in Delhi in 1875,

*[A] band of European strollers, their faces bedaubed with lamp-black, their heads covered with wooly wigs, in their hands the familiar banjo, **concertina**, and bones, and on the backs of their necks the old, old hats . . . appeared close to the Prince's dais, and favoured his Royal Highness with a version of "I'm Off to Charlestown," from a Christy's Minstrel book. The effect was almost too ridiculous for anyone to request them to go off to Charlestown at once. They sang their song in a villainous fashion, held out their shabby hats for money, and forthwith departed to frighten elephants, camels, and horses with their discordant shouts.*<sup>66</sup>

Beyond that sighting in India, the minstrels were extremely popular in Ireland, South Africa and Australia; many tunes and songs from minstrel shows have worked their way into local repertoires of popular "traditional" dance music and song (see discussions in Chapters 3, 5, and 7).

The wild, brash, and edgy minstrel and banjo music was popular not only in the working-class streets, but in schools and universities too, much as blues and rock 'n' roll were to be a century later, as this poem from the 1870 *Harrovian* (the student journal of the famous public school at Harrow, in Middlesex) shows:

In my lone room I strove to court the muse,  
And seek that peace which other haunts refuse:  
But hark! The **concertina's** vulgar tones,  
The deadly-lively rattle of the "bones,"  
The maddening jingle of the tambourine,  
The ceaseless failure of the squealing flute,  
The clicking banjo, unmelodious lute,  
The fiddle shrieking wildly beneath the rod,  
The Philistine howl of "Thomas Dodd,"  
Made work and reason totter on their thrones,  
And fall a victim at the feet of "Bones."<sup>67</sup>



Figure 30. Minstrel dance tune, from *Wickins' Easy Concertina Tutor*, London, 1897. Sand was scattered on the floor beneath a dancer to enable sliding and shuffling movements.

The minstrel shows penetrated far beyond the cities, into the smallest villages. An American traveler named Charles Nasby saw the following scene in a village in Surrey in 1881 (illustrated in Figure 31):

*The road is lined with public houses, little quaint inns in which nobody sleeps, but which are devoted exclusively to the selling of beer and spirits. At each of these, half the vehicles stopped, and the scenes about the [grounds] were curious, if not altogether enjoyable. The only business done inside was the drawing and drinking of beer, and outside—heaven help an American—negro minstrelsy. Imagine three cockneys burnt corked, and dressed in trousers striped in imitation of the American flag, with long blue striped coats and red vests, one playing the banjo, another the *concertina*, and the third doing the silver sand clog, with that peculiar soul-depressing, spirit-quenching expression that all clog dancers wear habitually. A clog dance on a stage in a hall is sufficiently depressing to send a middle-aged man home to make his will, but imagine it done by an Englishman on a board outside an inn, on a hot day, so hot that the perspiration streaming down his face washed the burnt cork out in streaks, and then when this doleful performance was finally accomplished, think of a negro melody sung in the genuine cockney dialect, and accepted as a correct*

*representation of the African-American. . . . People who love minstrelsy deserve nothing better.*<sup>68</sup>



Figure 31. Blackface minstrels, with banjo and German concertina, outside a village pub in Surrey, 1881. From David Locke's *Nasby in Exile*, 1882.

The same visitor noted the following in London:

*Couples of negro minstrels are a common sight on the streets, one armed with a banjo, and another with a concertina, that he plays with an atrocious disregard of time and tune, which under a despotism would consign him to the block. They roam from house to house and play, as they call it. The helpless family, worried to the very verge of madness, throw them sixpence, and they move on. They stand and play until they get their sixpence. . . . [W]oe be to you if you are short the sixpence.*<sup>69</sup>

That the urban working class particularly embraced this musical genre was clear not only from such street performers but also in the design of special German concertinas decorated with minstrel figures (Figure 32). At the upper end of the minstrelsy pecking order was the long-lived English *Moore and Burgess* minstrel company, mentioned earlier, which courted a middle and upper class clientele. Moore and Burgess employed a concertina player named Charles Bu Val. A typical minstrel program from 1895, at the New Theatre in Oxford, was described as follows:

*On Monday night the Theatre was crowded on the occasion of the visit for the first time of the Moore and Burgess Minstrels, some forty in number. The programme was both varied and attractive, and comprised negro songs, ballads, choruses, and instrumental pieces, the performers including also a first-class orchestra and a juvenile choir: the first part concluded with the Market Chorus from Masaniello, given very effectively. The second part was of a miscellaneous character, and was highly amusing throughout; it opened with a burlesque impersonation of a prima donna by Mr. A.E. Little, and was followed by a laughable travesty, "Military Tactics," Mr. Billy Hobbs in his exceedingly clever sand dance, **concertina** playing by Mr. Charles Bu Val, in which he gave capital imitations of various musical instruments and church bells, &c. The entertainment*

*concluded with an attractive feature of eleven musical tableaux vivants illustrative of the story of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," the last being a grand allegorical tableaux representing the well-known characters of Mrs. Beecher Stowe, and the juvenile choir and minstrels singing the chorus, "Hail, sisters fair, in freedom bound."*<sup>70</sup>



Figure 32. Endplate of German concertina decorated with minstrel theme, late nineteenth century. With thanks to Daniel Hersh and the Forum at [www.concertina.net](http://www.concertina.net).



Figure 33. Blackface minstrels, late nineteenth century. Note German concertina held by second musician from the left.

The significance of blackface minstrelsy to English popular music in the late nineteenth century can hardly be overstated, even though Anglo concertina players there and elsewhere rarely remember or recognize its influence today. In a later section we will discuss minstrelsy's effects upon music and dance in the rural English countryside. Until then, let us linger a minute with a large group of working- and middle-class



Figure 34. "Great Broughton Darkies Band," ca. 1912. Broughton is in Northamptonshire. Johnny Bowman played concertina and hanjo for this band, and his grandson Billy Bowman was a well-known musician in Cumbria in the middle to late twentieth century; he is now retired. With thanks to Sue Allan.



Figure 35. Strolling blackface minstrels, one with German concertina, London, 1892. From the *Strand Magazine*, vol. III. With thanks to Roger Digby.

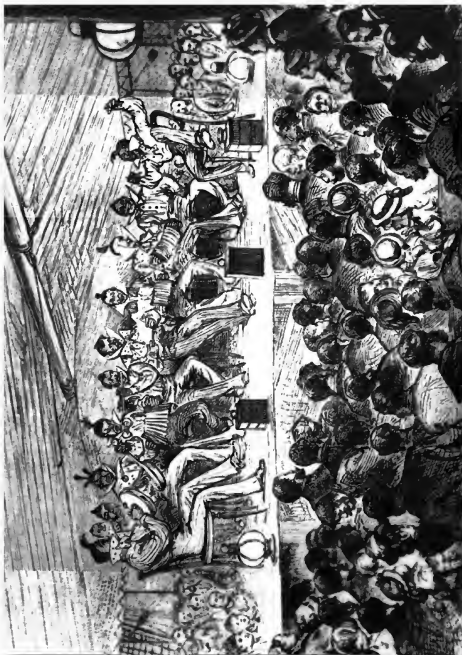


Figure 36. A blackface minstrel performance in a large tent, late nineteenth century. Note the two concertina players, as well as a musician with a small button accordion. With thanks to the late Nicholas Driver.





Figure 37. A musical duet, with German concertina and fiddle. Late nineteenth century. With thanks to Neil Wayne.

Londoners on holiday at the beach at Margate in 1897—waiting to be serenaded by “Negro” minstrels. The merry-makers were:

*[P]artly small tradesmen, partly swaggering clerks, partly well-to-do workmen, partly professional loafers and largely their wives and daughters. . . . Family parties sit within neatly dugout enclosures, mothers with the week's mending, fathers with their pipes. And children by the dozen, by the hundred, by the thousand. . .*

*And down into this mass of people, [who were] too stupefied by sunlight and sea air to seek amusement, come the same beloved negro minstrels who turn up at Epsom and Henley and Hammersmith, and at chance London street corners on a Sunday afternoon. But they are ten times more gorgeous at Margate; faces shinier, coats and trousers gaudier, sashes wider, buttonhole bouquets huger, hats jauntier, some in tights, some in flannels, with bones, tambourine and banjo all complete. And a wide space is made for them hours beforehand, and the audience collects, first a circle of children low on the sands, then circle after circle of the steamer chairs; then people standing behind the chairs, and more people on the embankment. For the late comer there is no getting near enough to hear a joke or a song. And when finally the morning's heroes arrive, they bring another audience with them—men, women and children dogging their every step through the street, patiently waiting outside every public house where it pleases them to stop. Talk of the success of a Patel or a Melba; it is nothing to that of the minstrels at Margate!*

*And down, too, on the beach come the seedy German bands and the unblackened strolling singers, and the men with pianos and concertinas and cornets and harmoniums, and the preachers and the photographers.<sup>71</sup>*

## The Anglo-German concertina in the music halls

In 1901, nearly one third of dwelling places in London consisted of just one or two rooms; these cramped dwellings housed over a million people (nearly a quarter of the city's population).<sup>72</sup> Unsurprisingly, working class people were often out and about in the evenings, and these perambulations included frequent trips to music halls, public houses and theatres that catered to the lower ranks of society. The music halls evolved from public houses in the 1850s, and by century's end had become both extremely numerous and popular. In 1878 London boasted fifty-seven licensed theatres, seventy-eight “large” music halls capable of holding from five hundred to five thousand persons, and three hundred smaller places.<sup>73</sup> The lack of liquor and food in viewing areas typically distinguished theatres from music halls. These various halls and theatres differed in class and status, as this 1891 report states:

*London music halls might be roughly grouped into four classes—first, the aristocratic variety theatre of the West End, chiefly found in the immediate neighborhood of Leicester Square; then the smaller and less aristocratic West End halls; next, the large bourgeois music halls of the less fashionable parts and in the suburbs; last, the minor music halls of the poor and squalid districts. The audiences, as might be expected, correspond to the social scale of the particular place of entertainment, but the differences in the performances provided by the four classes of music halls are far less strongly marked.<sup>74</sup>*

The top concertinists played the large, fashionable London music halls at the upper end of the scale. A recent article by Randall Merris has described many of them.<sup>75</sup> Nearly all of these top virtuosi played English or duet concertinas—players like Alexander Prince, Dutch Daly, Professor Maccann, and the like. However, in the many smaller halls and public houses that served working class clientele, Anglo-German and even German concertinas were to be found. In this

section we will examine a few of these sightings. Because most are described as “concertina” performances, it is not always possible to state with certainty what system was used. However, most documents that specifically describe the English-system concertina on stage describe performances of either classical or light classical pieces, as befit its Victorian social status. One may guess that the more plebeian middle- and lowbrow appearances discussed below typically used more humble German and Anglo-German models, and that they shared the limelight with duet models after about 1880. Period photographs and drawings partly corroborate that hypothesis, as shown in Figures 38 through 45.



Figure 38. An editorial cartoon from *Punch*, 1908, showing a woman with an Anglo-German concertina awaiting her turn at a music hall. The caption refers to the government of Berlin “stealing the show” at a recent European conference.

One early performer captured by press reports in 1856 was William Bindley, “who gave concertina and double flutina accordion solos

while suspended on a flying rope.” He later emigrated from England to the US.<sup>76</sup> In 1869, at St. James’s Hall in London (of minstrel fame, discussed above),

*The playing of Mr. Liskard—the “Musical Momus”—upon a common whistle, and his eccentric performance upon the concertina, may be cited as the best and most legitimate exhibition of the evening. In this man there is a talent which appears worthy of cultivation.”*<sup>77</sup>

In 1891 at Brighton’s Lyceum Theatre, Mr. Dan Gratton, Irish comedian, dancer and concertina soloist, shared the stage with, among others, blackface comedian Dick Davis and Monsieur Twiston, the “India-Rubber Man”.<sup>78</sup> At Wulff’s Continental Circus in London in 1894, “the musical eccentricities of the Brothers Krasucki include the two standing head to head and each playing a concertina.”<sup>79</sup> In 1911 at Hull’s Palace,

*Although not a big-letter turn, George Young blind musician and concertina soloist was rewarded last night by an outburst of applause that would gratify any star and although the scene was changed for the succeeding turn, the audience insisted upon a recall which was eventually given.”*<sup>80</sup>

Will King (1856-1954), born as William Emms, performed as a comedian and one-man band in the halls, playing not only the Anglo-German concertina but also the drums, musical glasses, clarinet, cornet, banjo and tambourine (see Figure 40).<sup>81</sup> Harry Thompson (1850-1937; Figure 41), father of the famous duet concertina player Percy Honri, had become well known by the 1870s in the Birmingham region as an Anglo concertina player and comedian. For a time in the early 1880s he teamed up with Albert Virto to form the blackface act *Virto and Thompson, the Musical Savages*, which performed mostly in the Birmingham area. A photograph includes two of their Anglo-German concertinas (Figure 42). A visit of the troupe to Paul’s Varieties in Leicester on March 24, 1884 prompted this description:

"...a series of drolleries, highly grotesque and ludicrous provided by Messrs Virto and Thompson, who manage to evoke musical strains from instruments not usually employed in selected orchestras, and go through a number of feats which are particularly catching."<sup>82</sup> Thompson also played English system and miniature concertinas.

At London's The Grand in 1895, in a variety dramatic piece entitled *In Old Kentucky*, Charles Bu-Val "introduced a well-appreciated song, dance and concertina solo" and, like the Virto and Thompson act, he performed in blackface.<sup>83</sup> In 1902, the German concertina took a turn as a prop on a desert island in the comic play, *The Admirable Crichton* (Figure 43). In an 1880s music hall drama, *The Six Stages of Crime*, "an additional attraction [was] the son of Charles Peace, the burglar-murderer, who played the concertina and answered any questions put to him by the audience." A court action was brought against the manager, "to restrict him from producing a drama which excited the enthusiasm of the audience to such a pitch that it became a nuisance."<sup>84</sup>

Fred Wright Jr. was a popular music hall performer at the turn of the century. In *Toreador*, a musical piece that played at London's Gaiety Theatre in 1901, he played a dealer in wild game animals who anticipated being tamed by an approaching marriage. He appeared in several musical numbers with a German-system concertina, which was a symbol of his unkempt pre-marriage lifestyle (see Figure 44). The "Bright and Bright" act in 1920 employed muscleman and ex-Royal Navy sailor David Jacob Blazer (1886-1940; Figure 45), who played the Anglo-German concertina.<sup>85</sup>

One of the big singing stars of the nineteenth-century halls was Arthur Lloyd (1893-1904). By 1876 his songs were collected by Alcorn and Company into "The third series of 25 Arthur Lloyd's new and popular songs, arranged for the German concertina."

By 1898, German system concertinas were almost synonymous with the music halls, or at least the lesser ranks of the halls. A reader of the *Musical Herald* that year wrote for advice "as to

the best kind of concertina, for solo and voice accompaniment, and the key to have it made in." The somewhat condescending reply says much about what sort of concertinas were playing many of the halls:



Figure 39. A comic music hall actress poses as a temperance lassie while singing a sentimental music hall song, in front of a painted theatrical backdrop. The sub-caption reads, "Songs some people should not sing." London, 1905. From the collection of Stephen Chambers.

*If your enquiry relates to the genuine concertina—the concertina invented by Sir Charles Wheatstone, and associated with the names of musicians prominent in the higher ranks of the musical profession . . . [then] apply to the makers, Wheatstone and Co. . . . Your enquiry as to "what key you should have the instrument made in," suggests, however, that you have in view the spurious order of instrument proper to the music hall and n---r minstrelsy, which has usurped the name "Concertina," and which in the trade is classed under the heads "German" and "Anglo-German" concertina.*

*The Anglo-German Concertina*

*The prefix "English" has for some years been much employed to distinguish the legitimate concertina from the above order.*<sup>86</sup>



Figure 40. Will King, Anglo concertinist, comedian, and one-man band. With thanks to Randall Merris.



Figure 41. Harry Thompson with Anglo-German concertina, 1909. He also appeared under the stage name Harry Toms. From Peter Honri's *Working the Halls*, 1973.



Figure 42. *Virtio and Thompson, the Musical Savages*, 1881. The team consisted of Albert Virtio and Harry Thompson, of Cradley Heath near Birmingham. Note the two row and three row Anglo-German concertinas and a one-row accordion.



Figure 43. Scene from the comic play *The Admirable Crichton*, 1902. From *The Play Pictorial*, London, 1903.



Figure 44. Fred Wright Jr. as Pettifer in a music hall production entitled *Toreador*, 1901. In the play, an impending wedding causes him to clean up his concertina-playing act.



**BRIGHT & BRIGHT, Versatile Entertainers,**  
in "**LEISURE MOMENTS.**"  
MUSICIANS, SENSATIONAL EQUILIBRISTS AND  
UNIQUE POISING with 1st CLASS COMEDY.  
P.A. at, Be'erfields Road, Deltion, London, S.W. 9.

Figure 45. The music hall team *Bright and Bright*, who used an Anglo-German concertina in their musical and comedy act, London, 1920. From an online biography of David Blazer at [www.maxalding.co.uk](http://www.maxalding.co.uk).

### The Anglo-German concertina in the Salvation Army

One of the most remembered and prominent uses of the German system concertina in the late nineteenth century was in the musical ministry work of the Salvation Army. William Booth founded the Salvation Army in 1878 in response to the same conditions of poverty and lack of jobs in urban areas that led to the proliferation of street music. The selection of German and Anglo-German concertinas by the Army for use in the streets was a good one: the instrument was already widely used by the poor in the streets, as discussed earlier. Thousands of members in England, America, Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere formed small musical groups or large parade bands that played rousing battle hymns for noisy street rallies and large indoor revivals, using concertinas, tambourines, fifes, and drums. In the Army's first two decades, the concertinas were generally of the Anglo-German variety.

**Background.** In the time of Dickens, religion was not something commonly associated with the urban poor. The elite aristocracy at that time typically regarded poverty as a moral failing of people who were too "indolent" or "dissolute" to work. The clergy of organized religion, especially within the established Anglican faith, tended to align itself with the gentry and its point of view. Ministry to the poor of London and other urban areas, therefore, was at low ebb in the middle of the nineteenth century. In 1854, Horace Mann presented to Parliament the results of a Census of Religious Worship taken in 1851. Mann noted that while religious observance in the middle class was up, "in cities and large towns it is observable how absolutely insignificant a portion of the congregations is composed of 'artizans' [Victorian parlance for the working class poor] a class so utter strangers to religious ordinances as the people of a heathen country." He also decried the wholesale indifference of many British Christians to the plight of the urban poor.

The poor themselves were largely dubious of and even hostile to organized religion. Efforts by evangelical groups like the Sabbatarians to restrict trading, transport and sale of beer on Sundays were met in 1855 by rioting in Hyde Park by London mobs. Those restrictions, along with another in 1856 that prohibited Sunday bands in the park, were seen by those of limited means (and leisure time) as direct assaults on workers' pleasures. Well-intentioned evangelicals who preached in the streets against the evils of beerhouses became special targets of the poor, who were ever ready to toss a clod of mud to silence an offending orator. Most significantly, however, the poor clearly sensed that they were not welcome in churches that catered to the middle class and gentry.<sup>87</sup>

After Mann's discourse, many well-intentioned people made efforts to right the situation. One of the most powerful and long lasting of such efforts was that of William Booth's Salvation Army. Booth, ordained as a Methodist minister in 1858, took to the streets to spread his Christian message:

*His original aim was to send converts to established churches of the day, but soon he realized that the poor did not feel comfortable or welcome in the pews of most of the churches and chapels of Victorian England. Regular churchgoers were appalled when these shabbily dressed, unwashed people came to join them in worship. Booth decided to found a church especially for them — the East London Christian Mission.*<sup>88</sup>

Reorganized as the Salvation Army in 1878, this mission became international by 1880, with the first overseas missions in America, Ireland, and Australia. The Army began working on problems of chronic alcoholism and homelessness, and met with great success recruiting "lassies" from the working and middle class, who took to the streets with their hymns and message of salvation.

**The Anglo-German concertina in Salvation Army activities.** The Anglo-German concertina

was part of this organization from its start. One of the earliest accounts of these salvationists is from a description of an 1876 William Booth-led rally, in the days of his Christian Mission:

*Easter Monday, 1876, was . . . spent by the army people from two or three of the smaller stations. Early in the morning a party from Bethnal Green, with violin and concertina, set off for the Finsbury Park gates, where many pleasure-seekers wept while the folly and sinfulness of their lives were described, and they were urged to return to the Lord. After several hours thus blessedly spent, the company marched singing down to the Abney Park Cemetery gates, where bands from Soho, Stoke Newington, and Tottenham, falling into a ring, a very large crowd was soon gathered. The power of God fell mightily upon the people, and two stalwart rebels knelt in the middle of the ring to seek mercy.*<sup>89</sup>

The first edition in 1880 of the Army's journal, *The War Cry*, describes an early street rally in the town of Chatham, Kent that included concertinas:

*Chatham. The whole town taken by surprise, Heaven raining floods, and The Salvation Army rejoicing in spite of all opposition. Colours flying, flutes, fifes, fiddles, and concertinas playing. Sinners crying for mercy, and saints going in for Full Salvation.*<sup>90</sup>

Many late nineteenth and early twentieth century converts and volunteers were proudly photographed in their Salvation Army gear, holding their beloved Anglo-German concertinas (Figure 46). The first concertina tutor for Army use was written by Herbert Booth in 1888, and featured the chromatic 26-key Anglo-German concertina (Figure 47). It laid out simple chord patterns use in song accompaniment in various keys.<sup>91</sup>

Not all of these early rallies met with approval on the East London streets, especially given the Army's steadfast opposition to drinking. In 1879, local publicans formed a "Skeleton Army" of street rabble to contest these rallies. The Army's street music also prompted



Figure 46.  
Portraits of late  
nineteenth-century  
Salvation Army  
volunteers  
holding Anglo-  
German  
concertinas. With  
thanks to Stephen  
Chambers.





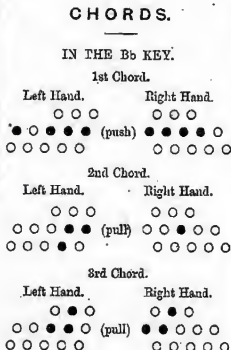
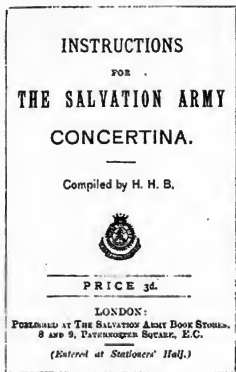


Figure 47. Cover and sample page from Herbert Booth's tutor for 26 key Anglo-German concertina keyed in Bb/F, 1888. Shown are the three commonly used chords in the key of Bb (the well-known "three-chord trick"); these would be vamped to accompany singers. From the collection of Stephen Chambers; the full text is available online at The Concertina Library, [www.concertina.com](http://www.concertina.com).

many protests about the noise. For their part, these early Army workers were aggressive as they mounted what they considered a "war" on poverty and drunkenness, as this vivid account (including the arrest of a concertina player) from 1883 shows:

#### Salvation Army Disturbances.

*The Salvation army paraded the streets of Luton [Bedfordshire, north of London] on Wednesday night. General Booth's "marching orders" to the corp, in face of the Mayor's proclamation, had provoked great dissatisfaction in the town. . . . [Two] companies of Salvationists assembled at No. 1 Barrack at seven o'clock, and a crowd*

*soon gathered around them. . . . Besides the police and the specials, the Army had obtained the assistance of a score of Blue Ribbonites—navvies and men of powerful build—to guard them. The men marched on their flanks, and when a rush occurred they were most active in throwing aside intruders, and keeping the procession together. At intervals they were received with a storm of hooting, and the Salvationists replied by shouting their chorus all the louder. . . . When turning into new streets, blocks invariably occurred, and attempts were made to break up their ranks, but the special guard rushed up to the points assailed, threw their opponents here and there, the Captain flourished her umbrella, and led the marching*

*chorus at a tremendous pace. . . In the melee a window in Park Street West was smashed, and, with much screaming from the females in the procession, the barracks were reached and all got safely inside. On the leaders reaching the steps they set up the song "We are marching on to war," and flourished a crimson flag. This was answered with groans.*

*A constable stated that on [the following] Sunday morning he saw the Salvation Army march out from their barracks and commence to sing. The defendant [later arrested for disorderly conduct] was making a noise with a **concertina** and dancing. They were surrounded by a large crowd, and the witness told the defendant he could not stay there, as he was blocking the thoroughfare. . . The defendant next put his **concertina** up into the witness's face, and told him he would cut his buttons off. [He was then taken into custody.] The defendant called upon the other members of the army to follow him into custody. There was a deal of shouting by the 150 or 200 persons who had assembled.<sup>92</sup>*

Similar disturbances in Truro, Cornwall in 1883 resulted in a lengthy court case with appeals:

*In the early part 1883 numerous complaints were made to the police of the great annoyance caused to the inhabitants of the city by the proceedings of the [Salvation] army, especially ...the disturbances caused by them in marching through the streets, accompanied by banners, and [in] sounding tambourines and triangles, and playing **concertinas**, thereby attracting disorderly crowds. A summons was taken out by the police against the officers of the army, but, as they undertook to desist from playing musical instruments in the streets, no fines were inflicted.<sup>93</sup>*

Edwin Gay, a captain of the Truro branch, however, was:

*[S]ummoned before the justices for playing the concertina in the streets and refusing to desist when the superintendent requested them to do so.*

On an appeal of the subsequent conviction, the High Court Justice stated that:

*Now what is unreasonable in that [ruling]? . . . [I]t is exactly like a well-known provision in some of the metropolitan acts, which in substance enables any householder who does not like barrel-organs to order them to go away out of his hearing. It is an extreme annoyance to have a man playing under your window with a **concertina** for a couple of hours, and having a number of people to listen to it and sing.<sup>94</sup>*

In another similar case in St. Albans, Hertfordshire (north of London) in 1882, William Booth's son Herbert (Figure 46) was arrested for playing the concertina in a Salvation Army procession:

*"Booth vs Howell" was the case of a by-law made by the Corporation of St. Albans under the Municipal Corporations Act, 1882, prohibiting the use of any noisy instrument to the annoyance of the inhabitants. A **concertina** was held by the Queen's Bench Division (May 1, 1889) to be a noisy instrument, and its use in a Salvation Army procession to be an annoyance, and the conviction of Mr. Herbert Howard Booth was upheld by the High Court.<sup>95</sup>*

Mr. Booth was fined ten shillings. His appeal caused quite some mirth in the press at the time, because of the court's indecision as to whether the concertina could be held as a "noisy instrument," as the ordinance stated. The following piece, with its witty doggerel, takes up the story from there:

"Is the Concertina A Noisy Instrument?"

*(In the Queen's Bench Division recently, Mr. Baron Huddleston and Mr. Justice Wills heard an appeal from a decision of the St. Albans justices, who, it was complained, had so far disgraced themselves as to fine a musical genius [Booth] ten shillings for "playing a 'noisy instrument,' to wit, a concertina, to the annoyance of the inhabitants of the city." Not having a concertina anywhere in court, and being a little uncertain as to its attainments, Messrs. Huddleston and Wills sent the case back to St. Albans, requesting the justices of that place to prove for a fact that the instrument in question was a noisy one.)*

Is the **concertina** noisy?

Oh my brother, prithee say  
Frankly, what is your decision  
on this question of the day?  
England pants to know your answer  
—England dies to hear you speak!  
Oh my brother, prithee hasten  
with the verdict that we seek!

Break insinuating silence,  
crush insinuating doubt;  
Let us have your mind, I beg you  
—come, my brother, speak it out!  
Stand not thus with head averted,  
look not thus in manner glum—  
(Concertinas are, I grant you,  
favourite instruments with some).

Let not sentiment direct you,  
let not prejudice intrude,  
But inform us frankly, freely.  
If you think it soft or crude.  
If its notes appear suggestive,  
as upon your ear they press,  
Of the nightingale "in feather,"  
or the turkey in distress.

O my brother, tell me truly,  
are its intonations wrong?  
Do its tones at all remind you of  
an angel's whispered song?  
Say, if you were down with fever,  
battling with an aching head,  
Would you bless or curse the man that played  
the thing to you in bed?

Is the concertina noisy?  
Is there darkness in the night?  
Is there redness in a ruby?  
Is illumination light?  
Is Victoria Queen of England?  
Is a red-hot poker hot?  
Is the concertina noisy?  
Is the concertina NOT?<sup>66</sup>

**The Battle of Torquay.** The granddaddy of all British Salvation Army disturbances—or perhaps better put, civil disobedience—was the so-called "Battle of Torquay," which raged between the Army and the local authorities the Devonshire seaside resort of Torquay for fully six months in early 1888, and eventually spread to the British High Court and to the House of Commons in London. The working-class Anglo concertina was to figure prominently in this fight. The following account of the "Battle" is abbreviated and paraphrased from P.W. Wilson's 1943 biography, *General Evangeline Booth of the Salvation Army* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, pp. 87-104). "Eva," as she was affectionately known, was a daughter of founder William Booth and a skilled Anglo player (**Figure 46**).

Although the Salvation Army, along with other evangelical groups, had been involved in outdoor meetings and marches with music in Torquay for years, the town's ratepayers (that subset of the town's citizens who owned property and hence paid property taxes) prepared a petition stating that:

*It is our wish that the town of Torquay, which is much resorted to by invalids and visitors, should be protected from the continuance of these processions on Sundays.*

The town's Local Board followed suit in January with a ban on Sunday musical processions. The following Sunday, a Salvationist was arrested for playing a concertina, along with other accompanying members of a musical procession. They were fined an exorbitant £5 per person, and when they could or would not pay they were imprisoned. A kindly local vicar paid their fines the next day,



Figure 46. Two of William Booth's children, with Anglo-German concertinas. Left, Herbert Booth (1862-1926) pictured with wooden-ended Jeffries Anglo-German concertina, ca. 1883. Right, Evangeline Booth (1865-1950) with Jeffries metal-ended Anglo-German concertina, 1896. With thanks to Alex von der Becke, Salvation Army Heritage Centre, London; and the Salvation Army National Archives, Alexandria Virginia.



and their convictions were appealed to London, where the High Court ruled in favor of Army defendants, conveniently using some problematic technicalities found within the town's law. The Local Board persevered however with continued prosecution, and in February the concertinist and his fellow compatriots were again fined. The battle was on.

Each Sunday for the next several months, local Army bandmen defiantly reappeared in the streets of Torquay, and the Local Board continued with more arrests and prosecutions. Onlookers thronged the streets each Sunday by the hundreds and thousands, with sympathizers and Salvationists from around the country surrounding the band to help protect its members. Arrested Salvationists were taken to Exeter prison by train, but not without a "Hallelujah" send-off from other bands--many arrived from surrounding towns--and a Hallelujah welcome as they eventually returned. William Booth sent letters praising the sacrifices of his followers. The town became polarized, divided into two

factions. The local paper, *The Torquay Times*, sided with the Salvationists, stating that "The methods of the Salvation Army may be peculiar and such as not to command approval, but...here in Torquay, as in every town and city in the Kingdom, the Army has been singularly successful in reclaiming the drunkard, the depraved and the irreligious."

As the Army's *War Cry* put it,

*The Army band at Torquay have their heart in their work. And it is not the least democratic side of the Army, that ideal of theirs--to foster music among the masses till it becomes an art for the people and by the people. The class at Torquay amid which, and for which, the Army works, seems to have grasped that it is fighting the battle of the masses.... On the other side are ranged local 'society'--black-hatted respectability, practical Tory-ism, the Army's 'betters' generally--everyone that cries "Hush" when one asks for a law to prevent wrong, and "Law and*

*Order" when one protests a law which destroys a right. How will it all end?*

After months of continued conflict, things eventually spiraled out of control, with young toughs coming into the town to make trouble, something disapproved of by both factions. And Salvationists were beginning to unduly suffer from their prison stints, some being illegally held beyond their sentences at Exeter jail, and many with families who suffered monetarily with their husbands and fathers imprisoned. Eva Booth was sent in by General Booth to resolve matters, and was wildly greeted by the Salvationists upon her arrival in Torquay.

After a week in which Eva Booth made speeches, gave support to prisoners' families, and visited soldiers in their homes, everyone expected a "High Noon"-style showdown on the following Sunday, and they were not disappointed. Hundreds came by rail from around the country to watch. After initially gathering in a large crowd, a group of lassies with tambourines led most of the crowd away.

*The band, with Evangeline Booth and her concertina, stood at attention for several minutes, and then marched in a different direction from that of the crowd. Two legal points thus arose. Was a band permitted to march if there was no procession behind it? And was the sound of a tambourine at the head of a procession to be certified as music within the law?*

The police, unconcerned with the finer details of the legal challenge, made numerous arrests. Eva Booth, who was called in the police report "a female with a concertina," was given a summons (which she laughingly promised to frame), and later in the week she stood in the dock, along with others arrested that day.

*Gentlemen," she said, "you have seen some of these men. They have been brought before you in this court. You have imposed penalties on them for far other offences than playing a trumpet or beating a drum. You have fined and imprisoned them for being drunk and disorderly, for thieving,*

*for other wrongdoings. What is to be said of you as magistrates when these men who are known to you as offenders against the law come back changed, sober, orderly, honest, and guilty of nothing but praising God with the instruments of music authorised by the Psalmist and blessed by the Saviour of mankind?*

The prisoners were convicted—all but Eva Booth, against whom the magistrates timidly declined to press charges. Another Sunday came, with more music and more summonses, including another for Eva. Eva told her followers, "I led the band, and if anyone gets three weeks, I should get six." She warned her compatriots not to pay any fines leveled against her. This time she was convicted, although the still-timid Bench declined to impose a penalty on her.

At this time, a sympathetic House of Commons in London came to the defense of the Salvationists. A bill was presented repealing the town's law against Sunday processions with music, and under pressure the Local Board folded its opposition. Eva came to Westminster to testify, and the bill was passed, ending the standoff in favor of the Salvationists. Torquay was to be the last sizeable challenge to the Army from British authorities, who had come to universally regard the Army highly for its charitable activities. Eva was promoted to Commissioner of the Salvation Army, and was a prominent leader in the Army for decades.

**Musical meetings.** Indoor Salvation Army meetings were also lively affairs, as the following sightings from 1884, 1885 and 1902 attest. A Salvation Army wedding was described as follows:

*A great number of the men carried musical instruments, and wore the insignia of the Salvation S on the collar. . . The women, clad according to regulation in the patent bonnet and sober garb prescribed for their sex by Mrs. Booth, were liberally provided with *concertinas* and tambourines, as indeed was befitting the marriage of a sergeant of a tambourine corps. As is usual on these occasions, the interval before*

the beginning of the service was enlivened by the singing of snatches of song, accompanied by all the instruments.<sup>97</sup>

A description of an 1885 service stated:

*The ordinary service of the Salvation Army is familiar to many. . . . The strains of a brass band, which have been growing louder for some minutes, burst with deafening force upon the ear as the players, blowing with fearful energy, file up the aisle and drop on their knees upon the platform. A steeply rising orchestra is what the*

*Army likes; the one before us is now filled with "Soldiers." The first hymn begins, the drum leading off to give the time. The start is pretty loud, but the fortissimo is reserved for the chorus, where band and voices chime in together. Several soldiers are armed with **concertinas**; nearly all the women have tambourines; those who have no instrument at all clap their hands to mark the rhythm of the music. . . . Each person beats time as if he or she were the conductor, and as if the utmost bodily exertion were necessary to prevent the music from breaking down. Each one, moreover, beats time in his or her own way. One*



Figure 49. Three American Salvation Army musicians, one with Anglo concertina. With thanks to Neil Wayne.

man seems to be perpetually hailing an omnibus; another pounds away with his fists as if he were kneading dough; another rolls from side to side until one feels every moment that he will lose his balance. The *concertina* players sweep their instruments in wide circles; the girls lift their tambourines on high, or turn to their neighbors with raised finger as if imparting them some startling information. The spectators—this word is more expressive than “congregation”—stare at the performance, a fair proportion join in the chorus, their voices being faintly audible amid the blare of the cornets and bombardons.

Probably the next song will be a solo with *concertina* accompaniment, in every way more pleasant to the ear and the devotional sense, for there is no gesticulation, and the voices of many of these Salvationists, if untrained, are full of natural sweetness, while they are taught to make their words audible.<sup>98</sup>

A description of a Salvation Army after-service, in London in 1902, observed that:

*It is a big, barn-like building. In the front row some twenty to thirty Salvationists were singing, shouting, and gesticulating, their leader pacing up and down like one possessed. At times he seized hold of a concertina, and almost danced as he played.*<sup>99</sup>

The general public was a bit skeptical of the Army and its working-class membership throughout the last decades of the nineteenth century, perhaps mainly because of the seemingly rough nature of many of its members, who were recruited from some of the worst slums of London. An 1883 cartoon from *Punch* (Figure 50) zeroes in on those misgivings. Two rough-looking converts are walking through a well-to-do part of the city, one carrying a copy of the Army's “War Cry,” and another a concertina. The caption went as follows:

Scene: Aesthetic Neighbourhood.

Converted Betting Man (plays First *Concertina* in Salvation Army Band): “Pooty ‘ouses they builds in these subu’bs, Mr. Swagget.”

Mr. S. (Reformed Burglar and Banner-Bearer in the same): “Ah! And how ‘andy them little bal-co-nies would ‘a been in former—

(A warning flourish on the *Concertina*, and Mr. S. drops the subject!)<sup>100</sup>



Figure 50. Cartoon from *Punch*, 1883, showing two rough-looking Salvation Army converts strolling through a prosperous neighborhood.

Those early misgivings slowly subsided as the Army proved itself and was accepted for its charitable roles. The use of smartly dressed “lassies” in Army bands helped improve their image considerably. Two groups of hallelujah singers from this period are shown in Figures 49 and 51. As Captain Alex Cadogan of today's Salvation Army noted of the latter photograph,



Figure 51. The Tring Songsters, a Salvation army band in the town of Tring, Hertfordshire, ca. 1900. Note woman near center with 26 key Anglo-German concertina. With thanks to Captain Alex Cadogan, Salvation Army, Chesterfield, UK.

*The hallelujah lassies are all in typical pose with timbrels at the ready. They would have formed a timbrel brigade—and would also have often led marches through the streets ending up at a mission hall somewhere. En route they'd have endeavoured to pull as many men as possible out of the local pubs and bars. As William Booth famously said, "some of my best men are women."*<sup>101</sup>

The Army, with branches in all parts of England and in many other countries, became a prime client of concertina makers such as George Jones, who recollected that "I was introduced to the Salvation Army and asked if I could make for them the Anglo in pitch to go with brass instruments. This I done and supplied them for fifteen years."<sup>102</sup> His son recalled that Jones would have to show up at Booth's offices dressed in full Salvation Army uniform to make the sales. Several of William Booth's children played

Anglo-German instruments (Herbert, Ballington and Evangeline), and used highest-quality Jeffries instruments (Figure 48). Ballington and Evangeline were both leaders of the Army in Canada and the United States, along with brother Herbert (see Chapter 9).

**Concertina Bands in the Salvation Army.** Most of these nineteenth century purpose-built Army concertinas were tuned in Bb/F to enable them to play along with brass bands. In time, bands were organized that employed only concertinas and drums; the earliest of these used only Anglo-German concertinas. The Bristol Citadel Band (West Country) was the first of several Salvation Army concertina bands. Formed in 1882, it finally disbanded in 1971. This band, equipped with 31-key steel-reed Bb/F Ball Beavon Anglo-German concertinas, was captured in a 1923 photograph (Figure 52). Over its long period of existence, its concertina players were all women,





Figure 52. Bristol Citadel Concertina Band, ca. 1923. Its members are playing Bb/F Ball Beavon Anglos. The band was formed in 1882. With thanks to Malcolm Clapp, Melbourne Australia.



Figure 53. Sheffield Citadel Concertina Band, 1908. The band was formed in 1888, and its members played Anglos. *From The Bandsman and Songster*, February 1908; with thanks to Neil Wayne.



Figure 54. Norwich Citadel Anglo concertina band, 1907. With thanks to Chris Algar and Neil Wayne.



Figure 55. Salvation Army Anglo concertina band, name and date unknown. With thanks to Neil Wayne.



Figure 56. Plymouth Congress Hall band, formed in 1892 and pictured in 1967. With thanks to Malcolm Clapp, Melbourne Australia. By the early twentieth century, a mixture of concertina types were in use in this band.



Figure 57. Weston-super-Mare Salvation Army Concertina Band, ca 1922. With thanks to Malcolm Clapp, Melbourne Australia.

and its leaders and drummers were always men.<sup>103</sup>

Sheffield Citadel (Figure 53) began in 1888, with many members having only inexpensive German concertinas. At first, the men played concertinas, and the women carried timbrels (tambourines). With time, the women began to play concertinas, and by 1908 when the photo was taken they had edged out most of the men. A description of the group in the Army's *Bandsman and Songster* (February 1908) stated that "The instruments are of the Anglo-German make; and amongst the most successful pieces played are the "Swedish" march, "Reign, Oh reign, my Saviour!" and various medleys in march time. The lasses, for the most part, play the melody, and the brothers put in their own harmonies."

A 1907 photograph of the Norwich Citadel band (Figure 54) shows numerous Anglo-German concertinas as well as one fiddle and a bass drum. A photograph of an early twentieth century band (Figure 55) shows that that group was completely comprised of Anglo-German concertinas; there were no percussionists.

Two other bands that used Anglo-German concertinas in early years (English-system and duet-system instruments more common later), were the Weston-super-Mare (Somerset) and Plymouth Congress (Devon, formed 1892) concertina bands, both of which also employed women concertina players (Figures 56 and 57).<sup>104</sup>

A book of arrangements for Salvation Army concertina band shows the playing techniques of these bands (Figures 58 and 59). The arrangements typically included a melody that was played in octaves, and an accompaniment that used oom-pah style chords. In some pieces, a third part consisted of a counter-melody which, like the melody, was played in octaves.

An East End charity worker, himself from London's prosperous West End, had this to say about concertina bands in 1908:

*We have a brass band, thirty players in all. I'm the worst, with my trombone. We also have a women's concertina band. It's terrible. But it*

*goes down. As one man said, "It mykes me 'ead ache, but it do do me heart good."*<sup>105</sup>

In the early years of aggressive, confrontational street marches, the Anglo-German concertina was the instrument most employed in the Army, and it was well-suited to that rough and tumble usage. With time, as conditions in the streets of London were increasingly improved, the Army, whilst never abandoning its mission to the homeless and hopeless of the urban landscape, added another mission: disaster relief. This required new and larger sources of donations from prosperous donors. At the same time, Army bands became more organized and more musically "sophisticated." Both of these factors favored the increasing use of English-system and duet-system concertinas, and the old Anglo-German concertinas were gradually phased out. By 1911 the English system was preferred, as the Army's in-house journal *The Field Officer* stated:

*Officers in particular know the importance of adopting the use of some instrument to aid them in leading singing in the Open-Air, especially in the smaller Corps where singing is difficult to sustain because of the few taking part. No instrument is at the same time so portable, powerful, cheap and easily manipulated as a concertina—the English type for preference, though the Anglo-German makes an excellent substitute.*<sup>106</sup>

The concertina made an impressive showing in the Salvation Army's charitable work during World War I, as we shall see later. After this war, it and its English concertina cousin receded from view in the Army, and brass bands became the key musical focus.

**MUSIC FOR CONCERTINA BANDS.**

**1st Concertina.** WITH SWORD AND SHIELD.

*mf Allegro.*

**CHO.**

*See.*

**2nd Concertina.** WITH SWORD AND SHIELD.

*mf Allegro.*

**CHORUS.**

Figure 58: Sample Anglo-German concertina band arrangement from the Salvation Army concertina tutor of 1905. With thanks to Randall Merriis, Washington D.C.



Figure 59: Salvation Army concertina tutor of 1905, featuring instruction for both Anglo and English system instruments. The music shown in Figure 56 came from this volume. With thanks to Randall Merris, Washington D.C.

### Other Anglo-German Concertina Bands

The Salvation Army was not the only organization to use Anglo-German concertinas in its bands. Anglos were also used in secular concertina bands, especially in the industrial areas of northern England. The Ashton-under-Lyne band was one of these. A photo shows the band sometime around 1890, when they used mostly Anglo-German concertinas (Figure 60). By 1909, they had replaced the Anglos with English-system instruments, mirroring the change from Anglo to the English system in the Salvation Army's bands at that same time.<sup>107</sup> It is probably not coincidental that Ashton's change to the English-system instrument occurred at the same time that the Salvation Army switched instruments. As competitions among bands in urban areas increased, the ability of the English-system concertina to play easily in numerous keys became important.

In New Bedford, Massachusetts, an Anglo concertina band was active in the early 1900s, and a photograph taken in 1913 of that group in full regalia has survived (see Chapter 9). This band consisted largely of immigrant English

textile workers from Lancashire and its environs. Another photograph, probably also from New Bedford at about the same time, shows a small concertina band without uniforms. They may be members of the New Bedford Concertina Band, and are likely English immigrants (Figure 61).



Figure 60. Ashton-under-Lyne Concertina Band, ca. 1890. At the time of this photograph, its members played mostly Anglo concertinas, but within a decade the band switched to all-English system instruments. With thanks to Tameside Local Studies and Archives, UK.



Figure 61. Anglo concertina band, Massachusetts, early 1900s. They may be members of the larger New Bedford Concertina Band, which consisted mostly of immigrant English textile workers from Lancashire. From the collection of Stephen Chambers.

## German and Anglo-German Concertinas in Rural England

### Hard times in the countryside

As we have seen, the urban landscape of cities in middle- and late-nineteenth-century England was awash with immigrants from rural areas. As desperate as the situation often seemed in the London streets, the countryside was worse: after all, it was from the countryside that large numbers of people fled, as agricultural decline continued (see "Background: English Social Trends in the Nineteenth Century," above).

The map displayed in Figure 1 shows the overall setting and extent of migration from rural England into the cities in the late nineteenth century: flight from rural areas took place almost everywhere. The following account from 1892 describes both the causes and results of agricultural decline and migration, painting a vivid picture of the hardship, loss and despair experienced by many in rural areas.

*Among the problems of modern life, none causes a deeper anxiety than the increasing tendency of populations to mass themselves in a few great centres. . . . Here in England, and now at the end of the nineteenth century, it is assuming a graver aspect than ever it wore elsewhere or at any other time. Our towns are already large beyond precedent, and yet they continue to grow at an alarming rate. Nevertheless, the indigent rural poor, if they move at all, finding an ever-colder reception abroad, are almost bound to drift into them.*

*It is hardly necessary to show at the outset that a regular and natural overflow from the village into the city is the reverse of an evil. When the vigorous, enterprising countryman, finding no adequate outlet for his energy and ambition at the ploughtail, comes to push his fortune in town, he is not doing harm, but good. . . . But the evil arises from the fact that it is no longer only the choice few . . . the one clever boy or girl of a family, who come to town. The movement has outgrown all proportion. . . . The country*

*parishes are doing more than merely sending their surplus inhabitants to town—they are being depleted.*

*It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that in some way or other the rural exodus is connected with the state of agriculture. . . . An obvious inference is that English agriculture is a failing industry. It is a less profitable calling than it used to be, and, consequently, incapable of maintaining as many workers. . . . The extremely low price of land, the number of country mansions let or closed because the owners are too poor to occupy them in the old style, and the acres allowed to pass out of cultivation, afford evidence of the same kind. Lord Salisbury, with many other influential statesmen, traces this result to Free Trade . . . It is not without reason that the British farmer complains most bitterly that he is ruined by foreign competition. . . . (As a result, a successful Cheshire dairy farmer said,) ". . . [T]he secret to farming profitably is to keep down the labour bill. Our work is done with the fewest possible hands. Not a man or a woman or child more than is necessary is employed."*

*Now the great impoverishment of the landed gentry has had a very striking effect on the village. . . . When the squire, perceiving that his shrunken income is no longer sufficient to meet the expenses entailed on a great county family, goes . . . to some cheap watering-place to economise, he naturally lets his hall, and there ensues a great loss of occupation to many humble dependents. . . . Thus woodmen and stable boys, gardeners and labourers are thrown out of work. In many cases several artisans, the blacksmith and the carpenter for example, are practically in the same position. . . . Thus the movement having once started grows of itself *crescit eundo* as Ovid says. When a farmer, unable to make a living of it, quits his holding . . . the mischief gradually spreads. Those broken, unkempt fences, fields overgrown with weeds, buildings out of all repair mean, among other things, that the local mechanics and labourers who kept them in repair are out of work or have left the district, that the village shops where their wages would have been*





Figure 62. An old man plays a concertina in front of Bond's Saddlery and Harness Maker. England; location and date unknown. With thanks to Neil Wayne.

*partly spent are being ruined by credit and the shrinking of custom, and that even the public-house is suffering.*<sup>108</sup>

This situation—poverty in a countryside that had once been richly endowed with jobs, cultural activities and music—brought the inexpensive German concertina to prominence in the countryside, although in types of uses that were strikingly different than those in urban settings. Whereas those new to the cities largely adopted the rhythm of life in the city and its streets, those who remained in the countryside tended to continue to observe the age-old rhythms of country life—although the mechanization of agriculture and other incursions of modernity changed life even there.

Figure 63 tabulates numbers of observations from period newspapers, journals, and books of

the use of German system concertinas in various urban and rural settings during the period 1850-1930. As was discussed above, urban players typically busked in the streets, on ferry boats and trains, or played in the music halls or for the Salvation Army. In contrast, rural concertina players commonly participated in old rituals like morris dance and mumming. Such rituals were much less frequent in urban areas of this period until Cecil Sharp's folk revival began in the early twentieth century. Old-style English "country dancing" was nearly extinct in the cities by the late nineteenth century, but still alive in the countryside. Finally, the Anglo's use in both pubs and churches was more commonly observed in villages and towns than in cities. In this section we will explore the Anglo's use in village pubs, churches, folk rituals, and rural country dances.

### Setting of German System Concertina Activities As Percentage of Sightings, 1850-1930

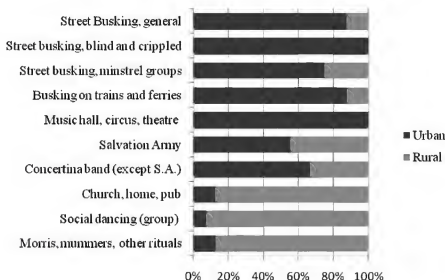


Figure 63. Setting of German system (German and Anglo-German) concertina activities, shown as percentage of "sightings" in newspapers, journals and books from the period 1850-1930, as sampled in 2009. Urban sightings are shown in dark gray; rural, light gray. Sightings in advertisements and tutors are not included. "Urban" areas are here defined as regions showing positive migration in the period 1851-1911, in the map of Figure 1.

## The German concertina in the country village

Amid a decades-long depression in rural England, one might expect that the trappings of village mirth, music and frivolity of earlier, more prosperous times would decline as rural populations either left or lived much more frugally. Indeed, some evidence exists that shows that musical activities generally shrank, including activities like country dancing, village church orchestras, morris dancing, and the like. Many rural musicians left for the cities, many of them to busk in the street there, and a large gap was left in village musical life. Just at this time, however, one positive aspect of global trade arrived in the countryside: the cheap German concertina. It was quickly and widely adopted by country people who often had no other musical resources, as period writings from village after village in the late nineteenth century show.

The demise of music in Norfolk villages is well documented. A first example is from an 1887 study of rural life by Norfolk parson Augustus Jessop, entitled *Arcady: For Better or Worse*:

*Of all the sad things that have happened to our villages, two of the saddest and most regretted are, the decay of all instrumental music among the country people; and secondly the decay of bell-ringing. Fifty years ago, and less, there was hardly a village church in Norfolk that had not its parish choir of grown men, and its half-dozen players upon the sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music. They are all gone. Here and there one finds a lad who plays a hymn tune on a concertina...but the old village minstrels have vanished, and the old clarionets and flutes and bass viols and trombones have been swept away, leaving nothing in their place. I only know one man within ten miles of me who plays the fiddle. He is a chimney sweep, and he performs here and there at the public houses, and the lads get up the pretense of a dance now and then, but it is more like a dance of death performed by grinning ghosts than by living human beings.<sup>109</sup>*

Three years later, in 1890, the London journal *The Musical Herald* sent a correspondent to Norfolk to visit its pubs, market stalls, and churches, in order to assess the status of village music there. That person had a difficult time finding much, but what he did find is of interest:

*Again and again I heard the story of departed "trade" and saw the empty stabling. I found the labourer slow in giving "orders," and it was common to see two or three men taking a mouthful in turn from one pewter.*

*A traditional melody or local ballad may afford some clue to musical tastes. . . . No such folksong had been heard. The merriest time for the labourer is after harvest, when he draws £5 or £6, the amount of his contract for getting in the harvest. His highest flight of merriment at that time is to do a shuffle on the floor to the accompaniment of a concertina. It cannot be called dancing; it is vigorous and rough . . . The songs that the labourer knows are either negro minstrel songs or the popular ballad two or three years after its death and burial in towns. The young labourer is fond of picking up trifles of this kind, and I learnt in several small towns or large villages that the n-----r minstrel concert gets the largest audience.*

*The home instruments of the Norfolk labourer are the concertina, accordion, or melodeon. As I talked with one labourer one evening, I was glad to notice how effusively he spoke of the 'cordeon being such "good company." He could not play much; but the possibilities of art are not high in scattered districts where the music teacher would not earn shoe-leather. Poverty as well as scant population stands in the way. "How can I make ends meet?" asked a labourer with whom I spoke, "I have ten children and myself and wife to keep, and the wages here are about eleven shillings a week." To such a man, instrumental music is a luxury outside his range. If then, the instrument that a labourer sometimes chooses is cheap and vulgar, we must be content. Better to have a tune on a concertina than a songless people....*

*The Rev. J.T. Howard (vicar of Great Plumstead, and a friend of Miss Glover) tells me that "almost every house possesses a worn-out concertina or a broken-down accordion."*<sup>110</sup>

It may have been the same Norfolk clergyman who wrote elsewhere in 1887 that "the labourers around him are decidedly musical, superior both for ear and voice to their brethren of Sussex and Berkshire. The concertina and accordion are the cottage instruments."<sup>111</sup>

From these reports, a common theme emerges: musicians have disappeared with the same ill wind that swept away jobs and workers. Among the remaining populace, music still must be had, regardless of poverty. They responded by buying from the flood of cheap, imported free reed instruments that were easy to be found, the German concertina chief among them. The situation was surprisingly similar to that of Ireland at that time. The professional class of Irish pipers—and to some extent Irish fiddlers—had disappeared through emigration. Faced with a certain loss of village music, the rural Irish picked up the German concertina.<sup>112</sup> From an Irish Times article of 1890,

*In Great Britain music thrives best in towns. The impoverishment of the agricultural districts has taken away much of the jollity of rural life, which, in days gone by, found expression in song. The British peasant rarely sings, but bewails his fate on a decrepit concertina. Ireland, which is an agricultural country, suffers in the same way. The folk-song is almost extinct; even the pipers are growing scarce.*<sup>113</sup>

Here then, in the midst of agricultural decline, are the seeds of concertina playing in rural England and Ireland . . . those two rural cultures that together form the backbone of Anglo playing today. It may have been simple and humble, but the German concertina won over working people in village after village. That even a person mired in poverty could still afford a German concertina is evident from this description of the home of a disabled, pensioned collier in Lancashire in 1867:

*The tiny house was exceedingly clean, and comfortably furnished. Everything seemed to be in its appointed place, even to the sleek cat sleeping on the hearth. There were a few books on a shelf, and a concertina on a little table in a corner. When we entered, the old collier . . . said that they were a family of six, and all out of work.*<sup>114</sup>

An observer of 1885, writing about music in rural England in an article entitled *The Music of a Village*, noted that:

*A show of hands as to the most satisfactory instrument would probably result in favour of the German concertina. This foreigner, with its "fatal facility," has helped drive out the fiddle and to spoil the ears of a rustic people. It is now the concertina that is the rule at rural merrymakings, and the fiddle that is the exception. The concertina has an alluring charm in the way in which it lends itself to processional purposes. You may see a performer strolling along the moonlit roads, while a bevy of appreciative friends go with him, and listen to his playing. This peculiarity makes the concertina in demand at certain weddings in which, after church, the marriage party makes a ceremonial progress through the village, a concertina player heading the procession. There is something of an antique simplicity in these processions, in the high priest of the solemnity flourishing his instrument in curves like those of the skater, as he wafts melodious incense, and in the noisy jollity of the people who follow him.*<sup>115</sup>

This observer also notes the existence of brass bands and bell-ringer bands. Other than that, he notes that:

*"A flageolet may be tootled here and there, but beyond what we have mentioned, the mass of the music made in villages is due to tin whistles, jews-harps, and the still ruder instruments fashioned with a comb and paper. This may be thought an unfavourable picture of village music, but it is true for a great part of the villages in the South of England, at least. On the one side there*

is a deep and sincere love for music, and on the other the most meager of opportunities for learning or for guidance in it.<sup>116</sup>

Here we can glimpse the musical prejudice of the elite aristocracy creeping in; not many in the rural countryside would agree that they needed such "guidance."

The next bit of writing, from Sussex in 1924, gives some insight into the role of the concertina in keeping old tunes alive, but is viewed through the eyepiece of a cultural bigot:

#### *Our Musical Idiots*

*I suppose every village in England has its musical idiot. And in writing of this national heritage of ours, I did not write with cynicism or from any superior attitude. Heaven has given us all our crop of sins and follies, and one might do infinitely worse than fill the position of musical idiot to the village of Sleepinghoe.*

*The typical musical idiot is a harmless, lovable creature, born with an ear for melody and with a head as full of tunes as a barrel-organ. It probably contains little else, but that does not trouble the musical idiot. He is as happy with his **concertina** or mouth-organ as David, King of Israel, with his harp. The musical idiot of the village is a mystery to everyone, including his mother. "I dunno where 'e takes it from," she will say with happy frankness, "neither his father nor me ever knew one tune from another. But 'e plays lovely. Always 'as ever since 'e was a little chap."*

*Herein lies the miracle. Nobody has taught the lad how to play and behold, he plays. It is true that nobody knows precisely what he plays. . . . If you pass by the cottage after work is done you will hear his **concertina**. "It's impossible to part that boy from his concertina," his mother will tell you proudly. Some of the neighbors wish it were not such an insoluble problem. But they don't say so.*

*Once upon a time I urged our musical idiot in Sleepinghoe to learn the piano . . . but he is*

*disdainful of the piano. "It's very well," he says, his eye wandering to my grey hair, "for folks as is old and getting short of breath, but give me the fife, that's the instrument." Not that he will admit inability to play the piano; his theory is that if you can play one instrument, you can play another. Once I wickedly lured him to my piano and begged him to play something. He looked through my music rather disdainfully. There was something of Chopin's on the music-rest. "What's this thing called 'Chopping'" he asked, "dance music?" I explained. He was neither dismayed nor interested. Why should he be, not having heard of Chopin? "Give me dance music," he said, "that's the stuff."*

*I gave him some. He played it, after his fashion. His fashion was peculiar. It lacked neither courage nor verve. But as he left out all the sharps the effect was peculiar. I asked him why he ignored the sharps. "Oh, them black notes," he replied, "when you're playing fast you can't stop to play them. Quick players never bother about the black notes." . . . "It's a nice pianner," he said when he left, "but I'd rather 'ave an accordeon. It's better for dance music. You can play steadier like."*

*Sometimes the musical idiot leaves the village and goes in for a musical career. . . . So he drifts away, and what becomes of him? . . . Before I made the acquaintance of the musical idiot I used to wonder where all the silliest songs came from. Some, I knew, came from America. . . . But they cannot be all transatlantic. Long ago I sought a solution. Only recently I have found the key. They are written by the village idiots who wickedly refused to mind sheep any longer and went to London to seek their fortunes.<sup>117</sup>*

Once we pass over the arrogance and cultural ignorance of the observer (and wonder whether he might have been writing about a young Scan Tester or another concertina player in Sussex of such talent), this passage tells us much. The village boys were picking up the concertina as a popular amusement, and they learned tunes without formal instruction. Like

youth of the present day who follow pop music, they had little time for the classical music enjoyed by older generations—or for the highbrow elite. We also see that the flight of people to the cities included not only ploughboys, but (of course) musicians. Finally, we learn that the latest trends in dance music were “the thing” for these rural youths, and that popular song was also a part of their zone of musical interest.

Others noted the fondness of village boys for concertinas. In the village of Pebworth, Worcestershire in 1885, “most of the boys to this day play concertinas or penny whistles.”<sup>118</sup> Scan Tester (1887-1972), the noted Sussex Anglo player, was born of non-musician parents. He learned as a boy from his older brother Trayton.

*Trayt learnt the concertina, probably during his teens around 1890, from a local lad five years older than himself, Joe Marten....Scan used to borrow Trayt's concertina when he was at work, and using his melodeon fingering (he had earlier learned that instrument), he was able to play a few tunes on one side of the concertina. After he had impressed everyone in the bar of the Green Man, his father saw the promise in him and bought him a concertina pitched the same as Trayt's.*<sup>119</sup>

F.J. Collins, in a 1972 *Concertina Newsletter* piece, recalled a player in Cornwall who spoke of the popularity of German and Anglo-German concertinas in his area in 1890:

*In these days, the 'tina was a very popular instrument in Cornwall, you could hear one in many houses. You could always buy a 'tina in the shops from 4s. to 5s. and many used to buy one just to have a bit of fun for the Christmas, and my belief is that is why many learnt the 'tina. Of course, they only had brass reeds, and when they went out of tune we should throw them into the dust bin. You could not get them tuned. But if you had one with steel reeds, German make, you could not wear them out. My father had one called “The Nightingale” for 21s., it was a handsome 'tina. But lastly my father bought one*

*by Jones of London: of a summer's evening you could hear it nearly 2 miles away.*<sup>120</sup>



Figure 64. Boy with German concertina, West Bromwich, near Birmingham, ca. 1880. From the collection of Stephen Chambers.

Its use in country processions —discussed in the piece from 1885, above—was also noted by others, in this case an observer in Ayrshire, much earlier in 1867:

*...in the country...the concertina is a favourite instrument, and much esteemed when played, with sprightliness, on returning home from fairs or markets, when it is the custom for the player to walk somewhat in advance of his companions, and thus seduce them into keeping step to the music, or, perhaps, when the strain selected hath gained popularity, those in the rear of the player will join their voices to the tune, and by these devices the distance to be journeyed over will be shortened by the diversion afforded to the mind, and all, who would otherwise be weary, greatly comforted.*

As I remarked before . . . the **concertina** is with country folk a prized and enjoyable machine, and in proof I will (and this from personal observance) instance the new fashion with barbers, who have relinquished the violin (*fiddle vulgus*) and taken into favour its gaudy rival with be-tinsed bellows. As with the guitar, moonlight conduces to the charms of the accordion or **concertina**, and in negro entertainments both figure with effect and are relished.<sup>121</sup>

### The concertina in the country church

The general poverty-related decline of musicians in late nineteenth-century rural villages became evident not only in pubs and at festivals, but in churches as well. By 1887, the situation was dire, and the German concertina often all that was left to fill in the gap, as was described in the Norfolk parson's description above:

*Fifty years ago, and less, there was hardly a village church in Norfolk that had not its parish choir of grown men, and its half-dozen players upon the sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music. They are all gone. Here and there one finds a lad who plays a hymn tune upon the **concertina** . . . but the old village minstrels have vanished, and the old clarionets and flutes and bass viols and trombones have been swept away, leaving nothing in their place.*<sup>122</sup>

His was not an isolated observation, as this 1890 account entitled *The Village Musician* shows:

*Some of us can remember when in the village churches the gallery was occupied by the village band, fiddles and viol, ophicleide, flute, &c. They were done away with, and the hand-organ took its place in some churches, a real organ or a harmonium in others. . . . Previously the smallest village had its half-dozen men who could play on some instruments. Now you find that there are half a dozen boys who can manage the **concertina**—that is all.*<sup>123</sup>

The general decline of musicians in rural villages was clearly related to the sharp decline in the rural economy and the vanishing population in many rural parishes. In the churches, the disappearance of musicians was also sometimes also laid at the feet of clergy who wished to modernize with an organ:

*How has this deplorable effacement of our rural music been brought about. There is only one answer . . . It has been brought about by the general deluge of smug and paralyzing respectability which has overrun our country villages. And for this I am bound to say the clergy and their families are in great measure answerable.*<sup>124</sup>

But for many, the reasons may simply have included poverty. In some areas, the concertina was welcomed or at least accommodated as a last affordable option to church music:

*In some churches the "hand" consisted of only one instrument, played as a rule by the clerk. Such a state of affairs formerly existed at Sarratt, a tiny Hertfordshire village, where for years the only music provided was by the clerk, who performed on the flute until he became too asthmatical to do so any longer, when his place was taken by a lame boy with a **concertina**.*<sup>125</sup>

This missionary of 1897 welcomed the idea of adding a concertina to his services:

*I have long felt the want of a small musical instrument to carry with me . . . and it has occurred to me that an accomplishment of my boyhood might be turned to account if someone would send to me a small, strong **concertina**. Our converts are all anxious to have a harmonium at each station, but, as that is impossible, why not go in for a **concertina**?*<sup>126</sup>

Several accounts show that rough converts would bring more than their souls to church; the concertina came as well—sometimes welcomed, sometimes not. A first example, from an 1895 Sunday magazine, describes one such convert:

*[A] wild sort of fellow naturally and at the same time being able to play the only musical instrument then in his fleet—a concertina—[he] was the chosen leader in many a wild carousal. Now he is one of the cheeriest and most useful Christians we know, and loves to tell, with a merry twinkle in his eye, how when he was converted his poor old concertina was converted too! It never played a song-tune again, but was figured in many a gospel meeting.*<sup>127</sup>

An 1880 conversion of a similarly unpolished village blacksmith in a Yorkshire church brought the same musical addition, but it was less welcome here:

*On a summer's evening you might sometimes see him walking in his garden singing snatches of his favourite hymns, accompanied by an old German concertina. And so great a friend of Jim's was this antique instrument, that when he joined the village choir, it required some amount of good-tempered expostulation to prevent its introduction into the service of the temple.*<sup>128</sup>

Most missionaries thought more kindly of the concertina. American Mormons recruited heavily among working class folk in England,

Wales and Scotland for their new earthly paradise in Utah. John Thomas recorded the beginning of his journey from Swansea to Logan Utah in 1888 with a train ride with fellow converts:

*[Aug] 11th first thing in the Morning I got a bite to Eat With Sister Evans. & Soon We Went down to the Train. & Soon Started for Liverpool. We had good times in the Train. Singing & the folks playing the fife & Concertina. About half past two P.M. we Arrived at Liverpool. & were Met by three or four Eders [elders].*<sup>129</sup>

Utah-bound Mormons were working class converts with a great love for dance music as well as hymns. Three decades earlier, Fanny Fry Simons, a Mormon convert who emigrated from England in 1859, sailed for America aboard the *William Tapscott* and recalled that there was "dancing and music every evening, with a very few exceptions."<sup>130</sup> John McAllister, who was a Latter-day Saint passenger aboard the *Manchester* in 1862, recorded: "Saints on deck dancing, singing, knitting, sewing, etc. Violins and concertinas in full blast."<sup>131</sup>



Figure 65. Hymn, from *Robert Cocks and Company's Hand Book of Instructions for the German Concertina*, with music arranged by Joseph Warren, London, 1855.



### The concertina in morris and sword dancing

Because German and Anglo-German concertinas had become very popular in English villages by the late nineteenth century among rural working people, it is not surprising that numerous references describe their use in the various and widespread rituals and traditions of the English countryside. These traditions typically follow the calendar, as will this discussion: morris and sword dances (typically spring), harvest dances and soul-cake singing (autumn), and mummers plays, Kentish horse appearances and Christmas caroling (winter).

Rural traditions like the morris were on the decline by the late nineteenth century in the countryside, but had long been extinct in large English cities. A particular difficulty for rural morris teams was the availability of musicians, especially the fiddlers who had largely replaced the pipe and tabor players of earlier times; many had migrated to the cities. Jinky Wells, the noted Bampton, Oxfordshire morris fiddler, remarked in 1943 that his grandfather had:

*...never had no trouble to get the dancers but the trouble was sixty, seventy years ago to get the piper or the fiddler—the musician. Sometimes they had a very great difficulty in getting one, they've had one from Buckland, they've had one from Field Town . . . and they've had to go out here to Fairford and Broadwell and out that way to get a piper.<sup>132</sup>*

In this environment the newly arriving German and later Anglo German concertinas found a new niche. Small, cheap, push-pull, and easy to learn, the Anglo was supremely well suited to the bouncy, jaunty dance music of the morris. This product of the industrial world was ultimately to significantly assist in the rebirth of morris traditions that had been threatened by a century of change and rural decline. A first documented association of the concertina with those involved in the morris is from Eynsham, Oxfordshire in 1858. Keith Chandler provides the account, gleaned from the notes of a petty session

held at Woodstock, Oxfordshire on December 6, 1858:

*John James, Wm. Bason, George Treadwell, and Charles Holloway were charged with being drunk and disorderly at the parish of Eynsham. Wm. Bason, George Treadwell, and Charles Holloway pleaded guilty. Edmund Carter, police constable, deposed that on Sunday morning, the 28th of November last, between 12 and 1 o'clock, the defendants were about the streets of Eynsham drunk, singing, and playing a concertina. Convicted in fine and costs 12s. 3d. each.<sup>133</sup>*

On the face of it, this report contains nothing of particular interest to us, except that this reference shows that the concertina had made it deep into the Oxfordshire countryside by 1858. Chandler, however, reminds us that all of the families of the men involved were active in village musical activities, including the morris, dances, and mummers plays. Of the errant bunch of tipsy singers, George Treadwell (b. 1836) had a father Richard (1805-1881) who was a fiddle player known to have played for dancing. When Cecil Sharp visited Eynsham in 1908 to record the local morris team, his contacts included members of the same James, Bason and Treadwell families involved in the 1858 incident, some probably sons or nephews of the 1858 inebriates. It seems reasonable to suggest that the concertina began working its way into morris culture during this decade.

An early account of the concertina used in the morris is this appearance in Shropshire in 1878, recorded in 1885:

*The last specimen of morrice dancing seen by me in Shrewsbury was during the hard winter of 1878-79, when about a dozen unemployed men performed a morrice dance through the streets of Shrewsbury to excite the sympathy of the benevolent. The music was supplied by a concertina, and the dance was to the tune of "There is nae luck about the house." The men had short sticks in their hands, and when they "set to partners" the sticks were struck sharply against each other. The dance was certainly a novel if*

not a pleasing one. The faces of the men were not blacked.<sup>134</sup>

The Wheatley morris team, Oxfordshire, also employed one by the 1870s.<sup>135</sup> The following table lists all known morris, molly and sword dance teams that used the concertina before 1935; each date denotes the first documented observation of concertina use. Some of the later teams shown on this list, such as those of Royton and Manley, were revival sides resulting from Cecil Sharp's morris movement in the First British Folk Revival, of which more later.

**Documented Morris, Molly and Sword Dance Groups with Concertina Players, pre-1935:**

Shrewsbury, Shropshire, 1878-1879  
 Wheatley, Oxfordshire, 1870s  
 Headington Quarry, Oxfordshire, 1880s  
 Winchcombe, Gloucestershire, 1880s  
 Bromsberrow Heath, Gloucestershire, 1897  
 Haddenham, Cambridgeshire, 1890s (Molly)  
 Histon, Cambridgeshire, ca 1890s (Molly)  
 Mossley, Lancashire, 1903  
 Oldham, Lancashire, ca. 1909  
 Abingdon, Berkshire, pre-WWI  
 Upton-On-Severn, Worcestershire 1925  
 Glossop, Derbyshire, 1927  
 Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1930 (sword dance)  
 Manley, Cheshire, 1934  
 Royton, Lancashire 1935

By the 1880s, concertina use appears to have been common in at least some remaining morris sides. An 1885 observer in Shropshire noted in a response to a comment in a journal that:

*I am not able to give "A Lover of Shropshire" a very complete description of the dancers and dances of the present day. He is quite right in supposing that the "tabor and pipe" have disappeared; they are replaced by the concertina, or sometimes a melodeon, either of which are usually played well. The tune is always lively, and one to which the dancers can "keep time" with great precision. I have never heard any singing. . . . The blacking of faces is perhaps modern, and detracts to some extent from the*

*dance. The dresses are as fantastic as they can be made by bringing into requisition every available bit of military uniform and plenty of coloured paper; thus the appearance of the dancers is made as ludicrous as possible, and is perhaps rather calculated to terrify women and children. To give the present Broseley people their due I must say that the dancers whom I have seen have always conducted themselves very well, although there is doubtless some of the "rough element" about them. The old "Lord of Misrule" has disappeared, and is replaced by the modern "Master of Ceremonies."*<sup>136</sup>

In the south Midlands, William Kimber Sr. (1849-1931), father of noted player William Kimber Jr. (1872-1961, of whom more below), played both concertina and fiddle, playing for the Headington Quarry side, Oxfordshire, by at least the 1880s.

The side at Winchcombe, Gloucestershire employed both concertina and melodeon in the 1880s.<sup>137</sup> Also in Gloucestershire, in the Forest of Dean, the side at the village of Bromsberrow Heath used an Anglo concertina player as a musician. We know of this side primarily through the activities of Stephen Baldwin (1873-1952), a fiddle player from that region. Baldwin's first involvement with the morris occurred in winter, according to Philip Heath-Coleman:

*[W]hen, at Christmas one harsh winter in about 1897, Thomas Bishop, the "King" of the morris at Bromsberrow Heath, fetched him over from Newent to stand in for the regular musician, a concertina player Bill Rudds, who was ill. Stephen Baldwin was so taken with the dance—which involved two parallel rows of three dancers alternately clashing sticks or stepping in pairs and dancing a figure of eight (a "six-hand reel")—that he taught it to a side he himself raised at Mitcheldean, where he was living at the time. . . . The tune he favoured for the dance was the Cock of the North, though the dancers at Bromsberrow Heath seemed to have preferred hornpipes, including the Manchester Hornpipe and the Flowers of Edinburgh. When it stopped, the morris at Mitcheldean was one of the last*

*sides to perform, not only in the area, but in the country as a whole.*<sup>138</sup>

Molly dancing was common in Cambridgeshire, East Anglia, and usually took place on Plough Monday, the first Monday after the old Christmas day (today, the first Monday after the Epiphany). A plough was drawn through village streets with an implicit threat that anyone not giving money to the ploughboys risked having their doorstep ploughed up. A resident of that village (in 1958) recalled from his boyhood in the 1890s that boys in the village wore fancy clothes, blackened their faces, and danced on Plough Monday evenings to the music of a concertina.<sup>139</sup> At the village of Histon, concertina player Richard Prior (b. ca. 1854) was the musician of what was locally called—interchangeably— "Morris" or "Molly" dancing. According to folk historians Joseph Needham and Arthur Peck, who in 1930 gathered recollections from both Prior as well as a former dancer named Samuel Asplin from the nearby village of Girton (both were involved in Molly dancing in the last decade or so of the nineteenth century):

*[E]ach village around Cambridge had its own team or "set"...The dancers used to start out from their villages in the early morning of Plough Monday and converge about midday on the Cambridge market-place, where they "danced against each other." ...Besides each dancing party there was also a party of six men dragging a wooden plough, and some men cracking whips....About five in the evening the dancers would return to their homes and rest, but afterwards meet and dance half the night. This evening dance had more of the quality of a ball, for women were present and danced the same dances which had served for the "Molly dancers" during the day. The names of the dances which Mr. Asplin and Mr. Prior could remember were The College Hornpipe, Birds-a-Building, Smash the Window, Double Change Sides, the Gypsies in the Wood, Soldier's Joy, and Richard's Riddle.*<sup>140</sup>

A description of the dance steps from that study reveals that the dances were almost identical to

country dances, although otherwise with all the trappings of morris dancing.

Figure 66. William Kimber in morris regalia, 1906. A two-row Anglo-German concertina rests on the adjacent table. From Sharp's *The Morris Book*, 1923.



Figure 67. Headington Quarry Morris dancers performing *Constant Billy*, 1899. From Sharp's *The Morris Book*, 1923.



Figure 68. William Kimber with girls in morris attire, ca. 1906. The woman, second from left, is probably Mary Neal. Photo courtesy the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, London.



**William Kimber (Jr.) and the morris revival.** By the last two decades of the nineteenth century, morris dance had all but disappeared from urban areas and apparently from urban ken, as this 1888 entry from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* made clear:

*MORRIS-DANCE, or MORRICE-DANCE, a performance for a long time associated with certain festive seasons in England, but now wholly discontinued.*<sup>141</sup>

Other period references, such as the 1880 *Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London) or Chappell's 1893 *Old English Popular Music* also speak of the morris in past tense. By the 1880s, few but a handful of antiquarians such as the Shropshire writer quoted above (note 134) recognized that the morris still existed in certain parts of rural England. Many urbanites soon learned much more of its rural survival as a result of a chance meeting in Oxfordshire between a London music teacher, Cecil Sharp, and a concertina player from Headington Quarry, William Kimber (Figure 66), on Boxing Day 1899. Kimber was playing for the Headington Quarry morris side that day. That the team was still around at all was partly due to earlier encouragement from New College Dean Percy Manning, who had encouraged the flagging team to continue to dance. The Boxing Day meeting is an oft-told story, but it also recounts one of the most significant meetings in the history of the Anglo-German concertina and thus bears repetition. As relayed by Kimber biographer T.W. Chaundy,

*A net of happy coincidences conspired to bring about this meeting. Mrs. Burch, mother-in-law to Cecil Sharp, acquired Sandfield Cottage just opposite "The Britamia" public house, a stamping-ground of the Quarry side. She commissioned Messrs. Knowles, for whom Kimber worked, to do things to her new property, and (Kimber) was sent to take instructions. Not unnaturally the talk turned to the Morris, and Kimber promised that they would call at Sandfield Cottage whenever the side was out.*

*This was the very year, it seems that Manning had persuaded the side to come out once more. Happily it was a hard winter that Christmas, though not happily for the Morris side, who were all building workers and stood off by the weather—"three weeks without a pay packet." Now Headington Quarry is—or at least was—a well-knit little village with much village enterprise. It had, besides the Morris, handbell ringers, church-bell ringers, two bands, mummers, and these with the carol singers were going round and collecting. This was too much for the idle Morris men, and at length they persuaded Kimber that they should go out with the bag and dance on Boxing Day: this seemed an outrage on all tradition, "dancing in the snow!"*

*They danced, as promised, at Sandfield Cottage and there, by another lucky chance, Cecil Sharp was spending Christmas. The side danced Laudum Bunches, Bean Setting, Constant Billy, Blue-eyed Stranger, and Rigs o' Marlow, as Sharp has put on record. Kimber remembers that they began with Bean Setting, which they "got through somehow" in the frost and snow before they went on to other dances. . . . To Sharp this encounter was the turning-point of his life, as he always maintained. Kimber was most struck by their dancing in the snow and on the next day, when Sharp, having noted down the five tunes, played them back to Kimber. "I thought that only my dad and I knew those tunes."<sup>142</sup>*

A few years later, Kimber was invited to come to London by Mary Neal, who saw potential use for these dances in the exercise and social improvement of factory girls in her Espérance Club (Figure 68). The story was picked up by a Dublin newspaper in 1909, a writer of which was either amused or intrigued that his English cousins were also awakening to the value of their rural folk heritage:

*The Saxon is imitating the Celt in the revival of the folk songs and the Morris dancing, which were once a great feature of the rural life of this country. The beginnings of this interesting*

movement towards the restoration of national characteristics seems to have been made among the working-class girls in a club in the Euston road. Some of the Cockney girls in this club had been infected by the example of their friends, with the result that they became adept in the Irish jig and the Highland fling.

*The secretary of the club procured from Oxford, strangely enough, a number of English songs and dances for her countrywomen. Two bricklayers, who played on the concertina airs that had been handed down from father to son for generations, willingly allowed their melodies to be harmonised, and their dances to be taught to the girls. The English folk songs have caught on, and two of the factory girls are teaching the dances in different parts of the country.*<sup>143</sup>

The first bricklayer mentioned is of course William Kimber Jr. It may be that the reference to the second bricklayer is a misprint, or perhaps Kimber's father came along.

Sharp reappeared at one of the Espérance activities, and he and Kimber began a long period of collaboration. Sharp lectured on the morris, and Kimber danced and played concertina. Sharp began a long period of research in rural villages that resulted in his *Morris Book*, a sourcebook for reviving morris dance. That the dances had "caught on" again by 1909 is clear from this story from *The Times*:

*Equally fascinating are the Morris dances which have been preserved for us by little brotherhoods of athletes—remember that these, like all true country dances, demand vigour rather than elegance—in various parts of England, including Oxfordshire. Many of us remember seeing the Morris danced down "the high" at Oxford at Whitsuntide; but little attention was paid to such manifestations of the desire of a country people—a desire as old and as young as England—for translating simple music into rhythmic movements of the body. We thought it all a seemingly unnecessary survival of old customs, and passed on without an afterthought of its significance to our own playing-grounds.*

*Certainly the Headington Morris-dancers did not dare to hope that the outer world would ever become interested in their mystery, that they would be constantly invited to London and other far-off cities to teach the dances which had been handed down from father to son. It is rather a pity that no Oxford undergraduate . . . ever thought of learning Morris dancing.*

*In Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire it is only of recent years that the violin and concertina have taken the place of the ancient, essentially English, dual-instrument. . . . [O]ne would like to see the pipe and tabor used once more for making the music, so that the lively pictures they present of old-world merriment, without repining or wistfulness, may be complete in every detail. [E]ven to-day the revival is very much of a reality; Morris dances are unquestionably popular with the younger generation. One would like to see them danced in summer-time by the heroes of the football field.*<sup>144</sup>

Kimber played a two-row Anglo-German concertina in his early years, possibly made by Jones or Lachenal (see Figure 66), but by 1909 he played a three-row Jeffries instrument, a gift from an appreciative audience. One of only a few early players to have been recorded in England, Kimber's playing style was crisp and purposeful, and his chording was simple but very well-developed, pulling out the very maximum that the two-row Anglo-German instrument could offer.<sup>145</sup> His musical life went far beyond morris music and is a testament to the rich musical tradition in rural English villages of the time. He was a member of the mummers, a handbell ringer, a member of a concertina club that met in a local public house, and a musician for English country dancing.<sup>146</sup> The above-mentioned *Times* reservations about its use in the morris notwithstanding, the concertina became very popular during the revival, both in brand new sides and "revived" groups. Two examples of Kimber's playing are contained in the transcriptions of Chapter 10.



Figure 69. William Kimber and the Headington Quarry Morris dancers, Oxford, 1949. From the *Oxford Mail*, with thanks to the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library.

Figure 70. Mossley Morris team in front of the Crown Inn, 1903. The side has three concertina players, Jack Robinson, Herbert Ormerod, and Jack Pearson, all standing to the left. With thanks to Howard Mitchell.



**Early twentieth-century morris teams and the concertina.** For all the attention on Sharp and his efforts at resuscitation, morris teams were still active in several parts of the rural countryside at the end of the nineteenth century, and these needed but a bit of public support to be renewed. In Lancashire, several towns had active sides in 1891, when the following account was penned:

*In the early part of this century, some hundreds of young men could be seen every autumn in Lancashire dancing the morris. Rush-carts were then numerous, and nearly all had dancers accompanying them. As the number of rush-carts gradually declined, the morris-dancers became less numerous, but some were to be seen at one place or another every year, and are still to be met with. There is a very good troop at Shaw, near Oldham, and another at Mossley. They go about to the various wakes in the neighborhood, and, with frequent practice, have attained a high degree of skill.*<sup>147</sup>

A high degree of morris activity continued into the new century at Mossley, where a 1903 photograph (Figure 70) shows the side with three concertina players as musicians, and an equally healthy number of dancers. The previous year, the side had accompanied its last rush-cart as a celebration of the end of the Boer War. By the 1920s, the side was aging, and a last hurrah was the Lord Mayor's Carnival of 1923. A revival was made in 1981, with no earlier members still living, and the group is still active.<sup>148</sup>

Similarly, morris dancing was in fairly healthy shape in nearby Oldham in 1909 and 1910, as the accompanying Figures 71 and 72 show. The Oldham dancers boasted an astonishing four Anglo-German concertinas when the 1909 photo was taken. The abundance of concertina players for these sides probably reflects both the peak of Anglo playing in all parts of England near this time, as well as the beginnings of the renewed interest in morris among the young, remarked upon in the 1909 *Times* article above. Lancashire was also the home of many concertina bands, so perhaps this also plays into the use of multiple concertinas in

these teams.

A writer in 1952 recalled seeing the team at Royton in previous years, accompanied by a band of concertinas and drums:

*The Royton Morris, Lancashire, stands by itself in numbers, dress and pattern. Ten men, a youth at each end, all in black velvet breeches, neat black clogs and perky jockey caps, swinging hanks of cotton bound up tightly into rolls; small men of the factory type, cotton spinners most of them. Out they march, their band composed of concertinas and drums, big and little.*<sup>149</sup>

This Royton team was partly a product of the morris revival. In 1928, Maud Karples of the English Folk Dance Society took the initiative to revive the Royton team with members from two pre-existing groups, each an active team at least as far back as the 1890s. When they traveled to Royal Albert Hall in 1935 (Figure 73), winning the All-England Championship, they had two Anglo concertina players, Peter McDermot and Ellis Marshall (1906-1993). After World War II, another Anglo player, Royton-born Fred Kilroy, joined Ellis Marshall. The Royton team was together for decades before disbanding in 1983.<sup>150</sup> Recordings of Marshall and Kilroy have survived. They both played the Anglo in an octave style (where most notes in the melody are played in pairs of notes an octave apart; see Chapter 10) that provided plenty of the volume needed for outdoor performances. In addition, Kilroy had a number of tunes in his repertoire that included many chromatic passages, at which he excelled. In order to achieve such a style, an enlarged Anglo of 38 or 40 keys was necessary. Fred Kilroy's 38-button Jeffries Anglo is shown in Figure 74. With such an extended-keyboard instrument, other more chromatic styles became possible; Kilroy also played for the Westwood Jazz Band, which consisted of five concertinas, several "bazookas" (kazoos attached to big horns) and a drum.<sup>151</sup> Transcriptions of *Cross Morris* by Marshall, and the richly chromatic piece *Blaze Away* by Kilroy, are to be found in Chapter 10, and a further discussion of these two musicians can be found at the end of this chapter.



Figure 71. Oldham morris team, ca. 1909. Note the abundance of four Anglo-German concertina players, with two drummers. With thanks to Howard Mitchell and the Forum at [www.concertina.net](http://www.concertina.net), and Dan Howison for his notes of 1959.



Figure 72. The Oldham area Morris team ca. 1910. Note the two Anglo concertina players. From Alan Ward, *Traditional Music*, 1975, with thanks to Rod Stradling.

Figure 73. The revived Royton morris team on a visit to Albert Hall, 1936. The concertina players are Peter McDermot (left) and Ellis Marshall (right). With thanks to Tony Marshall.



The Cheshire village of Manley revived its side in 1934 when a dancer from Oldham, Bob McDermott, travelled to Oldham to teach the dance. Local concertina player Caleb Walker (b. 1907, discussed further at the end of this chapter), with no experience at playing for morris dance, was recruited to replace a piano player.<sup>152</sup> The team continued to dance until the old age of its members forced it to fold in 1976.<sup>153</sup>

As the revival of the morris progressed, it concentrated on a rather rigid idea of what the morris was and should be; in particular, it emphasized all-male teams. In the Lancashire region, maleness had apparently never been a pre-requisite for the morris. After World War I, an insufficiency of returning dancers, through wartime casualties or simply age, prevented a resumption of some of the old teams, and girls' morris teams were the result, often formed by members of the old teams. One such team was the Westwood Morris Dancers, for whom Fred Kilroy played (Figure 75, taken in 1931):

*Jack Platt, the founder, trainer, and leader of the Westwood dancers . . . had been in Oldham men's teams before the war, as had the nucleus of dancers who formed the revived Royton Morris. . . . Jack taught Fred the necessary accompanying tunes by singing them to him, and the team was highly regimented, which was necessary for success in carnivals which were the raison d'être of morris dancers during these years. Fred was out nearly every weekend during the summer months at one carnival or another, where as many as 18 troupes might be competing. Each would have a concertina or a fiddler; Fred remarked that accordions were rare and reckoned it was difficult to get the players to get the right rhythm out of them. Jack Platt used to collect all the prize money won by the Westwood and divide it out at the end of the year. . . . Fred preferred the girls' dancing to that of men's teams he played for later, and regretted that this side of things was ignored by the EFDSS [English Folk Dance and Song Society], who were active in the revival of the Royton Morris.*<sup>154</sup>

Girls' "carnival morris," as it became known, has continued to thrive and evolve. At

present time, it incorporates aspects of drill teams and athletic cheerleading into a highly organized set of activities involving scores of girls' teams in northern England.<sup>155</sup> The Anglo concertina has sadly not kept up with them and is not typically associated with this activity today.

Revival activities in the Lancashire region also included boys' teams, as this newspaper article about a 1927 revival team in Glossop recollected (see Figure 76):

*Prior to the 1914-18 war, troupes of Morris dancers were reckoned part of the ordinary social life of the town; almost every lad, especially in the older parts of the town—Old Glossop and Whitfield—knew the Morris steps. . . For the carnival of 1927, however, an effort was made to revive the traditional Glossop Morris. . . As will be seen from the print, the costume was not the accepted traditional dress of Glossop Morris dancers, but it sufficed. . . . The music was supplied by the concertinas of Will Bowden and T. Byrom, and J. Whitehead was the drummer, the air being the traditional one of "Cheese and Bread, etc."*<sup>156</sup>

Another revival group, in Upton-on-Severn in the Welsh border region, was photographed with an Anglo concertina player in 1925 (Figure 77). As in Royton, Maud Karpeles was an instigator:

*Although they had not danced for four or five years, Mr. Griffin collected a set of dancers together to show Maud Karpeles two dances on the evening of June 10th 1925. The dancers consisted of himself, his two sons, his sons in law, whilst Alf, the eldest son, played the concertina. His daughter Edith was also involved to make up the numbers and appears on the photographs that were taken on the same occasion. Edith herself claimed that this happened quite often before this occasion, but only if the side was short of men.*<sup>157</sup>



Figure 74. Fred Kilroy's 38 button G/D Jeffries Anglo concertina. With thanks to Roger Digby.

Figure 75. Anglo concertina player Fred Kilroy (right) with the all-girl Westwood Morris Dancers shortly after their formation, ca. 1931. With thanks to Alan Ward.



Figure 76. Revival boys' morris team in Glossup, Lancashire, 1927. The two concertina players are Will Bowden and T. Byrom. With thanks to Howard Mitchell.



Figure 77. Two photographs of the revived Upton-on-Severn morris team, 1925. The Anglo concertina player is Alf Griffin. From Dave Jones, *The Roots of Welsh Border Morris*, with thanks to Annie Jones.

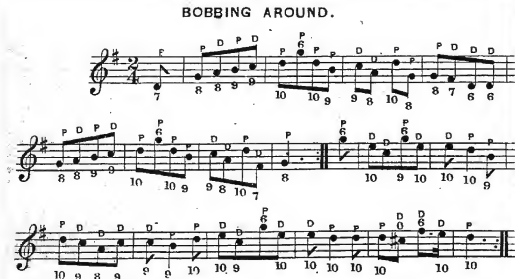


Figure 78. *Bobbing Around*, from *Chidley's Instructions for the German Fingering Concertina*, London, 1858. This American minstrel tune was adopted in somewhat modified form by Morris musicians at Bampton, Oxfordshire.

The music of the morris includes many tunes not familiar to the urban publishers of concertina tutors. Well-known morris tunes of today such as *Morris On*, *Bean Setting*, *Constant Billy*, *Country Gardens*, *Princess Royal*, et cetera, were not featured in tune collections and tutors aimed at German and Anglo-German concertina players, showing the wide gap between urban and rural life at that time. The transmission of such tunes seem largely products of a true folk process (most nineteenth-century rural musicians, it seems, did not read music anyway), and were brought to urban prominence in the early twentieth century due to the efforts of collector Cecil Sharp as well as those of English composer and orchestral arranger Percy Grainger. Exceptions occurred, however, including popular minstrel tunes adopted by morris teams. An example is *Bobbing Around*, danced by the Bampton, Oxfordshire side. Composed for the minstrel shows in 1856 by American William Jermyn Florence (1831-1891), this tune appeared two years later in *Chidley's Instructions for the German Fingering Concertina* (Figure 78), and it reappeared in several later nineteenth-century tutors, attesting to its broad popular appeal. In Headington, William Kimber played *Getting Upstairs* for the Headington Quarry side. American Joe Blackburn wrote this tune for blackface minstrelsy in the 1830s and published it under the title *Such a Getting Upstairs*. Royton's morris team used Stephen Foster's minstrel tune *Oh Susannah*, and Ellis Marshall was recorded playing that tune for dances there as late as the 1970s. At Manley, concertina player Caleb Walker also introduced that tune, which he called *Banjo on My Knee*: "It's a good tune—nearly all those American tunes fit—you could pick half a dozen out that'd fit it a treat."<sup>158</sup> Such examples show the deep reach of minstrel music into rural nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century English musical culture.<sup>159</sup> They also show that most morris musicians were on the lookout for any good tune that would go well with their dance and performances.

**Sword dancing.** The rapper dance (a "rapper" is a flexible sword) has its origins in the mining

villages of Northumberland and Durham, and accounts of its occurrence there date as far back as the eighteenth century. Cecil Sharp noted several tunes from this tradition in 1910. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, mass immigration brought thousands of Irish to work in the mines, and they made a large impact on the dance's music, which is usually in jig tempo. Musical instruments are typically the fiddle or tin whistle, but concertinas and melodeons are not unknown. A British newsreel photographer filmed and recorded a Newcastle-upon-Tyne sword team, all of whom were miners, in November of 1930; the musician was an Anglo concertina player.<sup>160</sup> The musician played a rapid Irish jig in a smooth, melodic style, more typical of Irish music than the bouncy, accompanied style typical of William Kimber.

#### **Mummers, ritual processions, and comic bands**

Concertinas were used in a variety of mumming activities and processional bands in Yorkshire in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century. An 1896 account of English mumming plays included the following description:

*In Yorkshire the mummers come round and perform a very short sword-dance, but their mumming is nothing like the elaborate play we have notices elsewhere. Near Bradford, bands of men dressed as n---r minstrels, in very fantastic costumes, perambulate the streets playing fifes, concertinas, kettledrums, and other instruments, and are known by the plain-spoken Yorkshire term, "Bletherhead Bands." Sometimes they enter the houses on New Year's Eve with besoms in order to "sweep out the old year."*<sup>161</sup>

Just such a group is shown in the photograph in Figure 79, which was taken in the village of Great Horton, near Bradford, ca. 1890. There are five concertinists, a trombonist, and two drummers, all in blackface. The effect of minstrelsy on English ritual customs can be seen

in the white eye patch of one of the troupe: this was a favorite guise for one of the most famous of the English blackface minstrels of the period, G. H. Chirgwin (1854-1922).

An earlier account of Bletherhead bands, from an 1875 description of a summer carnival day in the village of Bington, Yorkshire, does not mention the concertina—perhaps suggesting that this event may have occurred before their introduction there—but the description otherwise has much in common with the account of 1896:

*The word Bletherhead (to speak learnedly) is derived from Yorkshire, and signifies empty-head or noodle. Blether is Yorkshire for bladder, hence the word Bletherhead and its significance. . . . When Orpheus took his lyre to the nether regions, he could never have known anything about a Bletherhead band, or he would have assuredly have proceeded differently. The tootle-tootle of the fife finds its antithesis in the blatant roar of the serpentine tin instrument which coils five times round the body of the stoutest performer; the clear, ringing tones of the cornets are well contrasted by the angelic squeaking of a dozen penny trumpets, and, clinching all, in emphatic fervour, can be heard such a beating of drums, tin pots, and frying pans, as could not be surpassed by the regimental bands of the wild tribes of Central Africa. What the tune is I cannot make out. Now it sounds like a donkey Miserere, now like an Ethiopian breakdown, now like the Old Hundredth, and now like Dinorah's Shadow Song, played in half a dozen keys.<sup>162</sup>*

These groups were active in Yorkshire well into the twentieth century, as a recent history by Ronnie Wharton and Arthur Clark recalls:

*The chief role of these comic bands was to lead the processions for the carnivals and galas held during the Summer months. As the carnivals restarted after the First World War competitions between the bands became popular. . . . The main instrument in all bands was the Tommy Talker—today referred to as a Kazoo . . . working on the Kazoo as a base, various trumpet or euphonium shaped instruments were made. Bass instruments were constructed similarly but using a large*

*gramophone horn instead of the funnel. Watering cans, peggy sticks, rubbing boards and all manner of pots, pans and kettles were used. Surprisingly with such instruments it is said that a fair degree of musical precision was achieved and indeed a leader would conduct them as a proper band.*

*A stipulation of the competition was that all instruments had to be made of tin. Therefore while concertinas and brass instruments were frequently used in the processions, they were discarded once the bands arrived in the competition ring. The concertina would however be brought out again if an encore was called for and was also often used for busking on the journey home. The banning of "proper" instruments from the ring was presumably designed to keep the professional musician away from the prize money. . . . [M]ost bands performed mainly, if not solely, at the carnivals although the more established teams would entertain the whole year round. Several had smaller Christmas bands, featuring concertina players, and organised tours, for which a licence had to be obtained.<sup>163</sup>*

With a reduction of carnivals in the Depression years and the later intervention of World War II, Bletherhead and Tommie Talker bands gradually disappeared. A photograph of a Bradford Christmas band with three concertina players is shown in Figure 80.

A similar type of procession occurred in the village of Thoralby in the Yorkshire dales, during the Martinmas holiday (November 11), as recounted in 1901:

*During the Martinmas week Thoralby is aroused from her slumbers; then all the young men and maidens are at home for a week's holiday, and there is the usual dressing up of guys and mumming, etc., and the perambulating of the village to the din of concertina and fiddle, and the begging from house to house for anything to swell the big feast, which takes place either at the inn or some large room, ending with a jumping dance, which concludes the festivities.<sup>164</sup>*



Figure 79. Yorkshire Bletherhead band, from Great Horton, near Bradford, ca. 1890. There are five concertina players in this group.



Figure 80. Crown Street Christmas band, Bradford, Yorkshire, featuring three concertina players, 1928. With thanks to Rod Stradling, Ronnie Wharton, Arthur Clark, and *Musical Traditions*.

Another November custom was the practice of "souling" or "soulcaking," which occurred variously on All Soul's Day (November 2), All Saints' Day (November 1), or even Hallowe'en (October 31). An 1880 All Saints' Day account from Malpas, Cheshire tells of "three middle-aged men with a concertina, singing a really sweet chaunt with words to the effect that 'all that they soul for is ale and strong beer.'"<sup>165</sup> Soul cakes or a bit of fruit were the typical begging target of others. Caleb Walker (b. 1907), the Manley, Cheshire, concertina player mentioned earlier, participated in soulcaking in his youth in and around Norley, Cheshire, but it appears to have been a tradition in decline by that time. Walker remembered that some were in costume, and others only in street clothes:

*It had been going on for years and years. We were only a gang out for money. I got the tunes from my grandfather, cause he used to go round with them, years and years before. We went all round Norley—big houses, mostly—they'd give us a bob or something like that, which was a lot of money back then.*<sup>166</sup>

At another Yorkshire parish feast, this procession occurred for the Feast of the Epiphany at Aldborough in West Riding in early January, 1902:

*The ceremonial is peculiar. A number of villagers, farm labourers, etc., dress in an eccentric manner as shepherds, and parade the parish every here and there, executing quaint dances to the music of a concertina or a fiddle. They are preceded by a horn-blower, who, at intervals, sounds his instrument. Formerly they carried a doll dressed up in a fantastic way, and this, no doubt, was a relic of the Roman "Bambino." They also, until a few years ago, used to mount a set of stone steps which still exist on the village green. Then the best speaker among them called out the name of every man resident in Aldborough, proclaiming his besetting weakness, and, according to his popularity or otherwise, bestowing upon him a fanciful*

*nickname. This became so objectionable that the late Lord of the Manor put a stop to it.*<sup>167</sup>

Farther south, in Banbury, Oxfordshire, similar mumming occurred, as in this account from ca. 1910:

*The men used to say how they wanted to be made up, and my mother did it for them. Some of them had horns, some had bits of rag hung all over them, in tatters, some had twigs in their hair—all sorts, and with black faces: mother did that for them with a burnt cork. And they dressed up in women's clothes, old cast-offs. Oh they did look funny . . . Of course, women didn't go. It was a big drinking occasion, you see, they drank at every house. They stood outside, or sometime went into the hall to do their mumming, father playing the accordion and one year he'd had a few and was dancing as he played, and he fell over a low wall and damaged it . . . He had to come back for the **concertina** . . . in a black mood as well.*<sup>168</sup>

## Christmas and New Year's playing

Christmas in Cornwall met with concertina playing at festive gatherings in houses (also see Figure 81):

*Groups of four or five would come around—we played mainly to the higher class folk, and to the farmers, when we would get a glass of cider and a piece of Christmas cake, but the working class, who were mainly players, would join in with us with their **concertinas**, and we found many good players. Sometimes they gave us a step dance in the kitchen, with a glass of wine. The 'tina was a lovely instrument for quick music. Then at Christmas time we'd have dance parties in the kitchen. We used to have one dance, we would do, "The Polka", and at intervals all dance and meet at the centre. Then we had another dance called "The Heel and Toe", and we finished with a jig . . . You was lucky to get a shilling from each house in the olden days but as the years passed, we got more. . . Then of a Saturday night or at Christmas time, many would take their*



*'tinas to the pubs and after closing time they would do step dancing on a farm wagon with the 'tina, and dance for prizes.<sup>169</sup>*

A Gloucestershire writer reminisced about the following Christmas visitor, 1899:

*Nor must mention be omitted of old Isaac Sly, a half-witted labouring fellow with a squint in one eye and blind of the other, who at first sight might appear to be a bad man to meet on a dark night, but is harmless enough when you get to know him; he haunts certain seasons of the year, carrying an enormous flag, and invariably greets you with the intelligence that he will bring the flag up next Christmas the same as usual, according to time-honoured custom. He is the last vestige of the old wandering minstrels of bygone days, playing his inharmonious*

*concertina in the hall of the manor house regularly at Christmas and other festivals.<sup>170</sup>*

New Years had its own rituals, such as this one from Pembrokeshire, Wales, 1912:

*You will very probably be awakened by the strains of some musical instruments—preferably a concertina or accordion, but a mouth-organ will do—and the singing of children's voices. . . . If you are enthusiastic enough to descend you will find a group of boys of all ages on your doorstep, armed with little cups or mugs of cold water and sprigs of box, clamoring for the "New Year's water," to be taken in. If you accede to their request, the sprigs of box are dipped into the "New Year's water" and a tiny shower sprinkled over your face. This is supposed to bring great good luck to you and your household.*

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Figure 81. Band with two German concertinas, Saint Blazey, Cornwall, ca. 1890. With thanks to Stephen Chambers.

The appearance of the Hooden Horse was a Christmas staple in Kentish villages in the early twentieth century and before. A group of performers would visit houses, collecting money and engaging in horseplay with characters like a "Waggoner", a "Mollie," and of course the "Hooden" horse, its name variously ascribed to the words "hooded" (disguised) or "Odin" (implying a Saxon origin). The horse was a wooden horse's head mounted on a pole, carried by a bearer who was covered by a cloth. According to Percy Maylam, who chronicled the custom in 1909:

*There are generally two or three other performers besides, who play the concertina, tambourine or instruments of that kind . . . Singing of songs or carols is not usually part of the performance and no set words are spoken.*<sup>172</sup>

Figure 82 shows a Hooden Horse with an Anglo-German concertina-carrying "Waggoner", ca. 1909. The custom has recently been revived.



Figure 82. "Waggoner" playing Anglo concertina and carrying whip, with Hooden Horse, Deal, Kent, 1909. From Percy Maylam, *The Hooden Horse, An East Kent Christmas Custom*.

#### **A note on the relative absence of ritual activities in the cities**

The concertina was a fairly new instrument introduced at a time when many rural traditions

were in decline. The tradition bearers in most instances were working-class rural people, and the concertina clearly was one instrument with which they felt at home.

Where were these rituals in the cities at this time? After all, urban people led both the first British folk revival in the early twentieth century and the second folk revival that started in the 1960s. When rural people migrated to the big English cities in the middle-to-late nineteenth century, they came from villages where such rituals were still commonplace, and many of them as we have seen played the concertina and other "folk" instruments in London streets. Why did they drop the morris, mumming, Hooden Horses and soul cakes when they crossed the city boundary? The relative lack of references to mummers and such rituals in urban settings (at least in those references where a concertina is mentioned, as displayed in Figure 63) is striking.

Perhaps the huge scale of London and its growing suburbs made it difficult for the migrants of a particular village to stick together, so that such rural customs did not transport well: the old groups had been torn apart. Moreover, an immigrant in an uncertain, at times hostile, urban environment instinctively tries to fit in. Music hall songs and the minstrels were the urban happenings of the time, and new urban immigrants picked up those genres with gusto, as we have seen. A possible modern analog is available today in many southwestern cities in the United States, where vast numbers of rural Hispanics have fled a crashing Mexican farm economy. Many, perhaps most of these immigrants come from villages where folk cultures are still extant, if not robust. Even so, most children of these immigrants have abruptly dropped all of that in favor of urban hip-hop and plugged-in Tejano music, all the better to blend in. The sharp segmentation of nineteenth-century German and Anglo-German concertina playing in England, urban versus rural, may have developed in a similar fashion.

## The German System Concertina in Social Dancing

German and Anglo-German concertinas were at their best when used for dancing. Their rhythmic phrasing suited perfectly the new ballroom dances that revolutionized dancing in Europe, America and the British Empire in the middle-to-late nineteenth century. These dances included various types of quadrilles, as well as waltzes, mazurkas, polkas, schottisches, galops, and varsovianas. These popular dances partly displaced older forms of dancing in England and in anglicized parts of Ireland (country dancing and step dancing), and they nearly completely supplanted the older forms in America as well as many of the colonies of the Empire—the Cape Colony and the Boer Republics, Australia, and New Zealand. The extent of the ballroom dancing craze can be seen in the mixture of dances reported in accounts of the era, as well as in the repertoires of the surviving players of the Anglo concertina's heyday who were recorded in the twentieth century. The Anglo-German concertina excelled at these ballroom dances, and it and the also-diatonic button accordion played a strong role in shaping the tunes so frequently composed for these new forms and rhythms. Some of the tunes followed the dances from their origins in continental Europe; others were composed locally in one country or another. Concertina players in even the most out-of-the-way parts of the globe were aware of the latest tunes in a way that presages modern global pop music.

This section concentrates on social dancing in England during the German and Anglo-German concertinas' heyday. For those not familiar with the origins and timing of this all-important aspect of Anglo playing, we shall start with a brief historical overview of the development of European dance styles of the era.

### Background: a brief history of nineteenth century English social dancing

**Step dances.** The origins of this dance form are not clear, but it seems that those in Ireland began in the late eighteenth century, perhaps with the

rise of dancing masters.<sup>173</sup> In England, it seems that the variant most common today, danced with heavy shoes on a wood or stone surface, originated somewhat later, when dirt floors began to be replaced by stone and wood.<sup>174</sup> As English musician and folklorist Reg Hall notes:

*There has been a range of styles, but the common characteristics—relaxed posture, low center of gravity, loose swinging arms, rhythmic beating and scuffling of the feet on the floor, and glazed facial expression—unite the diversity into one recognisable phenomenon.*<sup>175</sup>

The hornpipe may have originated on English ships, as early as the sixteenth century. The *Sailor's Hornpipe*—tune and dance—was used for exercise on ships in Captain Cook's day (see Chapter 4). Jigs are more common in Ireland. They are thought to have developed in sixteenth century France or Italy and been imported to Ireland, Scotland, and England by the old dancing masters. The reel—thought to have descended from a “hay” (literally, a hedge), an interweaving figure of eight or “reeling” movement—was probably imported from France into England, Scotland, and Ireland around 1500.<sup>176</sup>

Step dances are relatively uncommon in most of England today, but they were still common in the youth of Sussex concertina player Scan Tester (1887-1972), when they were typically danced in country pubs. A general decline in step dancing in Ireland and England occurred in the early twentieth century, with a recovery (especially in Ireland) during the folk revival of the late twentieth century. One may still see them today in certain communities in England such as Dartmoor, Devon, among the travelers, and among the clog dancers of northern England.

Step dances came with British and Irish immigrants to Australia, America, New Zealand, and South Africa, but were almost completely supplanted later by country dancing and especially by ballroom dancing. The rhythms of these early dances—typically in 6/8, 9/8, 2/4, and



Figure 83. The opening position of the quadrille. From William De Garmo, *The Dance of Society*, 1875, New York.

Figure 84. The scandalous embrace of the waltz, and other "round" (couples) dances of nineteenth century ballrooms. From William De Garmo, *The Dance of Society*, 1875, New York.



POSITION FOR ROUND DANCING.

Figure 85. An Australian ball, complete with sacks of wool as benches. Note the concertina player, a fixture of rural and urban Australian dances. From *the Illustrated Sydney News*, August 8, 1889, with thanks to the State Library of New South Wales and Peter Ellis.



4/4 time—were widely adapted into English country dancing.

**Country dance.** In late-sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century England, “country” dances were a highly popular pastime in the countryside—so popular that they made their way to the English royal court and were then exported to the continent. Unlike continental European dances of that time, which were often danced without a partner, English dances involved couples dancing within larger groups of couples. Italian and French dancing masters used the terms *contra-danza* and *contredanse* for these imported English dances. English longways country dancing, danced by long lines of opposing partners, became especially popular both in England and on the continent. At this time, English country dances and their music were set down in John Playford’s 1651 *The English Dancing Master, or Plaine and Basic Rules of Country Dances*. All levels of society enjoyed these dances for the next 150 years or more, and new variations and tunes were frequently composed for them.<sup>177</sup>

French variations eventually came back to England as *cotillons*. French and English exports to Canada and the United States became *contra dances*. In Ireland, the old *Haymaker’s Jig* was originally an English longways country dance.<sup>178</sup> By the early nineteenth century, however, the popularity of the country dance began to wane, under attack by wave after wave of new “ballroom” dances from the continent. Invention of new dances within the old country dance form effectively ceased by the middle nineteenth century. However, some country dances continued well into the late nineteenth century in the rural countryside of both England and Ireland, as we shall see below.

**Ballroom dances.** The whole fabric of social dancing changed in the nineteenth century with a group of dances imported from the ballrooms of continental Europe. First to arrive was the quadrille, a derivation from the French *cotillon* that came to London ballrooms with Wellington’s returning troops in 1814. A

partnered dance involving four couples (Figure 83) who executed a series of *figures* that combined to form a *set*, the overall dance was comprised of several such sets, with intervening pauses. In Ireland, these new dances became known as *set dances* and were very popular in rural communities there well into the early twentieth century. In England and Australia they were known as quadrilles, the more popular ones perhaps being the *Lancers*, *Alberts*, and *Caledonian*. Under pressure from the couples dances that arrived still later (below), the quadrilles declined in England by the early twentieth century; of them, Sussex concertina player Scan Tester (1887-1972) could only recall the Lancers from his youth. They were still extremely popular then in Australia and New Zealand, where a large part of Australian concertina player Dooley Chapman’s repertoire consisted of tunes for them. In the United States, quadrilles continued to be popular in rural areas well into the early twentieth century; with the addition of a caller, they became known as *square dances* and saw a revival in the middle twentieth century.

A scandalous new ballroom dance, the waltz, arrived in London by 1816 from continental Europe, where it had developed in the early decades of the nineteenth century. The waltz’s close hold was considered shocking, and its early participants were characterized as “loose” (Figure 84). Predictably, it swept rapidly into the English and Irish countryside, and around the world. The waltz was the first of an amazing variety of such *couples* dances to enter London society from the continent, including the mazurka (ca. 1820s), galop (ca. 1840s), polka (1844), schottische (1850) and varsoviana (1853). Each involved couples dancing face to face in fairly close holds, at varying speeds.

The impact that these couples dances would have on all preceding dance forms—and hence upon the tune repertoire of many players—was profound. Like jazz and rock ‘n’ roll a century later, these dances were a global phenomenon, popular with people of all ages and all social stations. These dances and the first of their tunes reached outposts like South Africa and Australia

just as soon as they reached London. Deep in the Australian outback or the South African veldt, the dances and tunes arrived quickly, by both word of mouth and printed instructions with music. Often, British military bands introduced both dances and tunes in the cities of these colonies (see Chapter 5).

The passion with which young people followed these dances was easily equal to that of rock 'n' roll dancers of modern times. Rural dances in Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa usually featured concertina players (Figure 85) and often lasted throughout the night, breaking up only with the dawn, as succeeding chapters will show. Even in conservative Irish Gaelic society, these dances made huge inroads: music for set dances, waltzes, and polkas quickly became part of what we now term the "traditional" music repertoire.

**Decline and revival.** By the early twentieth century, dances associated with all of these older forms fell under a new onslaught: dances imported from the United States and Latin America, including various ragtime novelty dances, the tango, the Charleston, and the Lindy Hop. During this time Cecil Sharp began to collect what he believed to be the threatened last remnants of the old country dances in England, causing them to be brought back to life in English, Australian, and American schools. Post-World War II folk revivals in England and Australia often included imported Irish and American forms of quadrilles and country dances—namely, American square dances and contra dances, as well as Irish céili dances like the *Waves of Tory*. Many in English and Australian folk circles rejected them as foreign influences, despite the greatly interwoven history of these dances. Local versions of imported couples dances, most of them also under great threat, were typically not favored by the revivalists. In England, not until the "English country music" phenomenon in the late 1970s did the music of the ballroom dances begin to be widely noticed or respected as at all "traditional" (more on this below). Unfortunately, by then few of the old Anglo concertina players

remained. Rural parts of Australia, Boer South Africa, and Ireland fared much better in this regard, as ballroom dancing would last well into the twentieth century in country areas there; folk collectors scoured those countries in the middle twentieth century for song and dance. New Zealand fared poorly, as virtually no collectors stepped in to record older players and dancers until it was too late. In America, the contra dance continued in New England, and the old quadrilles took on new life as square dances in a country-wide revival—but without the aid of surviving Anglo-German concertina players, who by the time of the folk revival had died or been forgotten.

### Concertinas in urban English social dances

Although dancing was extremely popular in English cities during the late nineteenth century, relatively few accounts exist of concertina players providing such music (for example, see Figure 63). One involves the activities of the young ferryboat concertina player mentioned above (p. 16). He played for balls in London in the 1850s. These gatherings were not the elegant balls of the elite, but the dances of working-class and, perhaps, middle-class people. As recorded by Mayhew in 1856:

*At night when I leave school I go and play music three nights a week at a ball. . . . It's a very nice ball-room, and there are generally about 200 there. They pay 1s each. There are four musicians, a fiddle, a harp, a fife, and a concertina. . . . The room is like a street almost, and the music sounds well in it. The other three play from notes, and I join in. . . . The first time I played in an orchestra I felt a little strange. . . . I could play the tunes well enough, but I didn't know when to leave off at the exact same time they did. At last I learned how to do it. I don't have any stand before me. I never look at any of the others' music. I look at the dancing. You've got to look at the time they're dancing at, and watch their figures when they leave off. . . . I get 2s. 6d. a-night for playing there, and plenty to eat*

and drink . . . On ball-nights I'm sometimes up to two o'clock in the morning.<sup>179</sup>

It bears repeating that 200 noisy dancers in a single room danced to only four musicians (one a harpist), in days before electric amplification. Such was not unusual, and concertina players developed a style of playing called the octave style to deal with that, where they played two notes at a time, an octave apart. In Australia, all recorded old-time players used this technique in their dances, as did Scan Tester in England, and several players in Boer South Africa: it basically doubled the available volume. William Kimber used a variant of that in country dances he played for in Oxfordshire, adding a third interval to the octaves, creating partial chords in time with the beat. Whether or not these techniques were used by the young player in 1856 is not known.

An Australian visitor's account of New Year's eve 1889 in London provides another glimpse. He describes an impromptu street quadrille:



Figure 86. Three backyard musicians, one with German concertina, England, ca. 1900. From the collection of Stephen Chambers.

*My way was now along the Strand where the jollity was higher than ever—couples waltzing on*

*the trottoir, unmusical trios singing songs, and I am sorry to add, a couple of policemen keeping by playful skill of exchange a banjo from the hands of two young women who were trying to rescue it. In Monmouth Court—which is no ancient ducal palace, but only an uncommonly dirty passage—a sort of rough square dance was being performed to the music of a concertina; and so all along the Strand were incidents of clamor and coarse fun.<sup>180</sup>*

Many documents exist describing elegant upper class balls in London and other English cities, but none are known where the concertina was employed. The elite did not favor the Anglo-German concertina, and by the late nineteenth century the English system concertina was also rare among the upper crust.

#### Concertinas in rural social dances

**Country dance.** By the middle of the nineteenth century country dance was essentially dead in English urban areas. But in rural villages in England and in Scotland country dance continued, although with a much-reduced variety of dances, as this 1861 interview in London of a traveling fiddler shows:

*It's very jolly among farm people. . . . At night, the men and women used to sleep in a kind of barn, among the clean straw; and after the beer-shops had closed, . . . they'd say to me, "Come up to the dox and give us a tune," and they'd come outside and dance in the open air, for they wouldn't let them have no candles or matches. Then they'd make themselves happy, and I'd play to 'em, and they'd club up and give me money, sometimes as much as 7s., but I've never had no higher than that, but never less than 3s. One man used to take all the money for me, and I'd give him a pot o' ale in the morning. It was a penny a dance for each of 'em as danced, and each stand-up took a quarter of an hour, and there was generally two hours of it; that makes about seven dances, allowing for resting. I've had as many as forty dancing at a time, and sometimes there was only nine of 'em. I've seen all the men get up*

together and dance a hornpipe, and the women look on. They always did a hornpipe or a country dance. . . . My country dance was to the tune "Oh don't you tease me, pretty little dear." Any fiddler knows that air. First they dances to each other, and then it's hands across, and then down the middle, and then it's back again and turn. That's the country dance, sir. I used to be regular tired after two hours. . . . They only danced when it was moonlight. . . . You mustn't think this dancing took place every night, but only three or four nights a-week. I find 'em travelling along the road.<sup>181</sup>

Country dance tunes could commonly be found in German concertina tutors, as in

Russell's *German Concertina Tutor*, published in 1854 in London (Figure 87).

A harvest barn dance in rural Haddington, in the East Lothian hinds of southern Scotland, was described in 1883:

The oldest rustic festival here is the harvest home, or "Kirn," where once a year master and servant dance together to the tune of a violin, a flute, or a *concertina*. It is preceded by a supper in the granary—a long loft, lit up with candles, and deals placed on sack rows of grains for seats. . . . Very old tunes, such as *The wind that shakes the barley*, are brought to life again, and old wayward songs . . . are sung.<sup>182</sup>

86

# A FAVOURITE SET OF COUNTRY DANCES.

TUNE.—*Merrily Danced the Quaker's Wife.*



TUNE.—*Garry Owen.*



TUNE.—*You told me when.*



Figure 87. Country dance music, from Russell's *German Concertina Tutor*, London, 1854.



An 1889 observer, also in Scotland, noticed that:

*[T]he sole really popular sort of amusement is that which is furnished through the medium of a fellow-labourer who can handle the fiddlebow or the concertina, and discourse the sweet but simple music of the national airs of Scotland. It is only when there is a chance of a good rousing rustic dance that the farm-labourer awakes from his lethargy, and foots it with might and main. . . [T]he raffle [and dance] is held in the barn of some small farmer or humble crofter. . . . Dance follows dance, and tune follows tune, until the ravers of the old barn ring again. But as already hinted, these re-unions are mostly things of the past. Pulpit denunciations and whisperings of illegality have, generally speaking, effectively killed them; though it must be told . . . that they have not absolutely died out.<sup>183</sup>*

This 1901 account from Worcestershire in the West Midlands laments the disappearance of outdoor country dancing:

*Ten years ago unsophisticated and spontaneous out-of-door dancing still took place in the village street on summer evenings. It was unpremeditated and unannounced; a tin whistle, a tambourine, or perhaps a concertina supplied the music; men danced with their wives, girls with girls, boys with boys. . . . Little by little this has been given up. The labourer finds no delight in his work, and demands that a course of entertainment with an up-to-date programme be provided to him by others. . . . A drab machine-made uniformity is becoming universal.<sup>184</sup>*

By the early twentieth century, such country dancing was essentially dead, even in rural areas. The tireless Cecil Sharp worked to revive it, and the modern English Folk Dance and Song Society grew out of those efforts.

**Step dancing in pubs.** As outdoor country dancing declined, the village pub had become a social center for certain forms of step-dancing. Most village pubs date from the Beer House Act

of 1830, which allowed “beer-only” premises to form, with extended trading areas. These pubs largely replaced earlier tap-rooms and inns. The noted Sussex musician Scan Tester (1887-1972; Figure 88) played concertina for step dancing at these pubs from a very early age, as Reg Hall recounts in a 2008 interview with Vic Smith:

*VS: I suppose that today people will think of social dance taking place in dance clubs and at barn dances, what would have been the actual locations that Scan would be likely to have played at in his early days?*

*RH: Well, I think almost exclusively the tap-room of a pub. There weren't village halls in those days. . . . There were a few “reading rooms.” These were for working men in the villages and they were often subscribed by the gentry or by the working men themselves. They might have been big enough to assemble in and have a dance or a party, but mostly Scan, very early on in his career played in the tap-rooms of pubs to an almost exclusively male audience.*

*VS: So it would be step dance tunes . . . hornpipes . . . mainly to suit that type of thing.*

*RH: Hornpipes. . . the odd 6/8 tune. I'm not really sure that Scan ever used the word “jig.” I'm not sure that he would call The Irish Washerwoman a jig. . . . But he called the hornpipes “step dance tunes.” That was the great thing, especially in the pubs over in Ashdown Forest, at Nutley and Fairwarp, and it's interesting that Scan at 10, 12, 13, 14, he used to go off about four or five miles specifically to learn music—the tunes. And he learned, he said, from men that were in their seventies or eighties. And so he knew that he was playing old-fashioned music then.*

Scan described taproom step dancing as follows:

*Course, they used to come in the pubs, you know, with their heavy boots on—the old pelted boots and all—and yorks and all on, and you see 'em*



Figure 88. Sussex Anglo concertina player Sean Tester (1887-1972), with Daisy Sherlock (piano) and Reg Hall (accordion), ca. 1965. With thanks to Reg Hall and Roger Digby.

out in the room that time of day doing the old stepdances, and they used to, if there was enough of 'em, they'd form a figure eight or form a four angles, you know, cross angles, and, you know, there was a lot of different ways they used to dance.<sup>185</sup>

As we have seen, such step dancing occasionally spilled out of the pub and onto the street, as in the description of the street dancing in Kent during hopping season (see pp. 71-73).

**Ballroom dancing.** A Cambridgeshire account describes the practice of nineteenth-century dancing booths at carnivals and fairs, at a time when the English country dance was giving way to round (couples) dances:

*Harry Huntley . . . was the last harp player known to have played for dancing. He and his father, Jack, who was a fiddler, used to play together at Comberton and other feasts and at the fairs. They took round with them a dancing booth with a sectional floor and a box for the musicians: the two Huntleys, and a concertina player and a drummer. A box was placed in front*

*of the booth for the collection of money. When long-wise country dances were in vogue it was easy for each dancer, as he reached the box, to place in it his fee for the players, but musicians found it more difficult to get their money when round dances, waltzes, etc., became more popular. To ensure that every dancer paid, someone had to be stationed at the door of the booth or other dancing place to collect the money as the dancers arrived.<sup>186</sup>*

An 1872 fictional account of a fair at "Mopetown" by Charles Dickens describes a similar ballroom dance, but for a quadrille: "The platform on which so many entertainers had figured was occupied by the quadrille band of Mopetown—a scant company of musicians—a pianoforte, fiddle, German concertina, and cello . . ."<sup>187</sup> A decade earlier, at an 1862 fair at Upware, Cambridgeshire, the dancing booths were busy, and the dance of the day was a "Bustle," described by an eyewitness:

*Shoals of people were everywhere about and the heat was intense; the dancing booths were crammed full, pugilism was in the air, fighting was going on in all directions, in close proximity to love-making . . . and there was a babel of noise from the harp and violins, the blowing of horns and concertina playing. After each dance there would be a rattle of heels as was customary with the villagers. The whole pandemonium was punctuated by the noise of the skittle alley, a pastime much in vogue then.<sup>188</sup>*

Sometimes an impromptu dance amongst bothy-system farm labourers was just the thing for a cold winter's evening, as in this 1892 account:

*The beds were up in what had once been a loft, and were the strong iron variety standing on clean-swept, uncovered deal, and looking clean to say the least of it. Until they came together at the preceding term, they all had been strangers to one another the men said. They liked the life fine, and did not feel at all dull. On winter nights they amused themselves with draughts, and one*

of their number played the *concertina*. Occasionally they moved the table out of their living room and managed to get up a dance. "With the house servants as partners?" I suggested, and a general smile seemed to show that they were not without female visitors occasionally.<sup>189</sup>

These farm workers and other village folk would often be invited on special occasions to the local manor house or the vicarage, where they would rub shoulders with another social class. The following account of 1877 shows the gentle amazement of the upscale vicar's wife of Embleton, Northumberland, at the extensive dancing repertoire and skill of the townfolk. A mixture of country dances and the newer ballroom dances were performed, with the concertina being a favorite of the young men present:

*Our dance came off Wednesday with great success . . . Our guests arrived at 7; we were forty-four altogether; our music was the only thing which was not altogether successful. The fiddler whom we had engaged had felt so bashful*

*in coming to what he considered such a grand house that he had cheered his spirits by a little whiskey first, and the whiskey seemed to have gone to his fingers and made his playing muddled. We varied his playing with quadrilles on the piano from me and polkas on the *concertina* from some of the young men.*

*You would have been surprised to see the number of dances they performed. They did everything that is danced in the ordinary ballroom, though their valseing [waltzing] did not come to much, besides they danced four or five kinds of country dances, schottische, reels and polkas. Some of them danced extremely well, and it was amusing to watch the difference in their dancing to that of people of our position. They put their whole energy into their dancing and thought of nothing else, conversation played no part in the proceeding, but the dancing was everything and had to be done as well as was possible. In fact, the faces of most of them were solemn all the time as if they were accomplishing an important task . . . At 1:30, they all went home and left us very tired.*<sup>190</sup>



Figure 89. A family band in Darlington, Durham, ca. 1910; photographer C.W. Kipling. Courtesy of the Beamish the Living Museum of the North, image copyright Beamish Museum Limited.

The prime decades of the Anglo-German concertina, from the 1880s through World War I, partly overlap with the prime playing years of Sussex concertina player Scan Tester. He started playing in the 1890s, and so missed the glory years of rural country dancing and of quadrilles, but his repertoire is otherwise a good indication of the mix of music in rural southern England at the turn of that century. The discography in Reg Hall's 1990 book about Scan Tester's life, *I Never Played To Many Posh Dances*, includes a list of available recordings of Tester. Figure 90 is a bar chart showing the distribution of these tunes by type. Besides song tunes, the dominant categories are step dances and couples ballroom

dances: waltzes, schottisches, and especially polkas. The large number of step dances reflects the occurrence of step dancing in country pubs during Tester's youth. Of lesser numbers are country dances and quadrilles/set dances, which as discussed above, were on the wane in the late nineteenth century. One twentieth-century dance on that list, a one-step, was introduced during the ragtime era, in about 1910. Tester undoubtedly knew many more modern dances, as he is known to have played two-steps, the Charleston, foxtrots and other such dances with his *Tester's Imperial* band in the 1920s;<sup>191</sup> somehow they were never recorded.

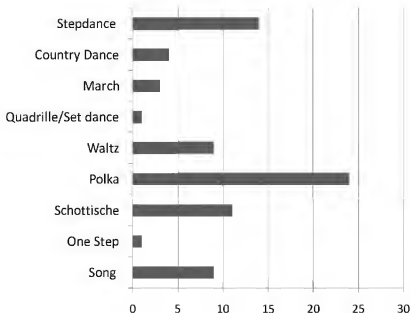


Figure 90. Sussex Anglo concertina player Scan Tester's recorded repertoire, displayed as numbers of recorded tunes for each dance type. Compiled from the discography in Reg Hall's *I Never Played to Many Posh Dances*, 1990.

## Social Tensions

### Elitism, working-class culture, and the concertina

As late-nineteenth-century English cities grappled with the burgeoning migrant population, both from at home and from foreign shores, and as rural areas felt the effects of agricultural decline and rural flight, class distinctions within the existing social order grew ever more sharply defined, and these distinctions extended to the playing of the concertina. Those in the aristocracy and the upper middle classes who had adopted the genteel English concertina as their own (e.g., Figure 91) were quick to criticize those in the working class who adopted the “foreign” German concertina. Partly this was a form of free-reed “sour grapes,” as the country was awash in German (and later, Anglo-German) concertinas, while the English-system instrument was increasingly ignored on the European classical music stage to which its players aspired. A larger reason for this was pure class tension: the music of the rough-and-tumble crowd who played German concertinas in the street and in pubs—whether it be step dancing tunes, polkas, or music hall ditties—was seen as an evolutionary throwback by both high society and journalists, who saw in classical music the proper goal of a modern society.

Rancor from those playing the English-system concertina community emerged early, as expressed in this 1855 London advertisement:

#### *The Cheapest Concertina*

Messrs. Boosey and Sons beg to state that Case's *Four Guinea Concertina* is sold at a trifle above the cost price, for the express purpose of superseding the worthless instrument called the *German Concertina*, which, from having but half the proper number of notes, is thoroughly useless in a musical sense. Case's *Four-Guinea Concertina* has double action and full compass, and is a perfect concert instrument.<sup>192</sup>



Figure 91. Clementina, Viscountess Hawarden with English system concertina, 1860. The English concertina was strongly allied with elite society in mid-nineteenth century England. Reproduced in Carlo Mavor's *Becoming*, 1999, Duke University Press.

The German concertina was outselling its upscale cousin, the English concertina, by perhaps 100 to 1 at this time, as we have seen in Chapter 1. It may be that the German concertina's rough but popular use in the streets was beginning to tarnish the image of the genteel English instrument, as Stuart Eydmann has noted.<sup>193</sup> The English concertina also suffered from the lack of successful performers, as one of its players remembered in her old age in 1919:

Regondi gave a concert in Cheltenham which Rosie and I attended, and I was so fascinated with the unusual effects to which the instrument lent itself that I was seized with a strong desire to play it myself. Papa brought me a *concertina*, and when, as it happened shortly after, Richard Blagrove, a pupil of Regondi's, came to Cheltenham to teach it, he let me take lessons of him. I improved rapidly and soon learned to play it quite well.

*The concertina has now become a thing of the past; only a few people to-day have ever heard of it. This may be because there never were more than three or four really effective public performers on the instrument, and they passed out of existence. When they ceased to be before the public the concertina "cult" gradually died out among amateurs. It was but a short-lived fad of fashion, much like bicycle riding.*<sup>194</sup>

By the latter part of the nineteenth century, after decades in which no able successor to Regondi could be found, several efforts were made by ardent proponents of the English concertina to return it to its former position of prominence. These efforts typically included abuse hurled at the German instrument. In a review of a musical exhibition in London in 1884:

*Messrs. Ward seem determined to restore the reputation which Regondi acquired for the English concertina, an instrument which has long suffered unaccountable neglect. Let us hope that their propaganda will succeed in bringing about the abolition of the **German concertina**. Under their auspices Signor Alsepi is now giving concertina recitals in the small concert room of the Italian section of the Exhibition.*<sup>195</sup>

Signor Alsepi was a blind Italian English-system concertinist and former student of Regondi's, popular in the concert circuit of the time. In an interview in the 1889 *Pall Mall Gazette*, both Alsepi and his interviewer make it clear that the German and Anglo-German instruments were beneath all respectability:

*"How is it, Signor Alsepi, " I asked by way of opening the conversation, "that by most people it is considered *infra dig.* to play the concertina?"*

*"Prejudice, nothing but prejudice, which, however, is not quite undeserved. What most people imagine to be a concertina is nothing of the kind, but simply a double accordion, and even then it is in most cases one of those cheap foreign things which are capable only of reproducing a very limited number of sounds."*

*"Then I suppose you agree with me that the music of what I usually called the concertina is not like the music of the spheres?"*

*"I should say it is not. It is vile, altogether vile, and it is responsible for the disrepute into which the concertina has been brought. But listen to this, and tell me whether it is not possible to produce real music on the concertina."*<sup>196</sup>

At which time Signor Alsepi produced a Beethoven sonata on his English concertina.



Figure 92. John Preston Johnson, an English concertina performer and proponent, who described the German system concertina as "a vulgar toy...from which no good music can be produced." From *The Magazine of Music*, London, July 1892.

A similar sentiment was expressed by another popular proponent of the revival of the English concertina, John Preston Johnson (Figure 92), in 1896: "This charming and legitimate concert and drawing-room instrument must not be confounded with that vulgar toy imitation—the German concertina, from which no good music can be produced."<sup>197</sup> Others were slightly more charitable, but scathingly condescending, as this observer of 1904:

*The German concertina is admittedly an inferior instrument. Still, we must not sneer at the thing. I believe it does give a measure of enjoyment to some of our hard working people; it is better for them to listen or to dance to a German concertina than to hear no music at all. In time they will learn to like something better.*<sup>198</sup>

Whether the invectives hurled at the German and Anglo-German concertinas were from these classical artists themselves or from an elitist-leaning Victorian press where the stories were written is sometimes difficult to determine. In a story about classical English-system concertinist Christa Hawkes, a journalist relates some tips from Miss Hawkes for readers setting out to play the concertina: "Remember that *the* concertina, as distinguished from the cheap German atrocities with which Bank Holidays make us all too familiar, is a high-class musical instrument..."<sup>199</sup>

Many musical highbrows of the time were obsessed with the charge from abroad that the English were an "unmusical" nation, and the blame for that criticism was often laid at the feet of street performers and their instruments, as in this 1896 note:

*I may observe that the taunt that we are an unmusical nation finds some apparent justification in the support which we as a people give to the miserable apologies for performers who come over to us from the lands of the sausage and macaroni. But on the real question itself I am ready to join issue with the taunters . . . music is steadily percolating through the various strata of society. Passing a row of working class dwellings during the (working class) dinner time this week I heard in the space of twenty yards a cornet and a violin being played or practiced upon. . . . Singular to say, the same evening while walking from Barnfield House to High-street I heard, on passing one of the Southernhay houses somebody sacking "Two little girls in blue" on an accordion or unlovely German concertina—I can't say which, but I pitied those little girls; it was enough to make anyone blue.*<sup>200</sup>

A Mr. Goldsmith, speaking in 1893, gently spoofs the notion of English un-musicality:

*"The question often arises—are we a musical nation? The foreigners think we are not. But where in the wide, wide world is there a country where you will hear so many organs and German bands? Where is the country, excepting ours, that can appreciate the concertina? Where, except in England, can you hear that delightful combination of harp and cornet outside a house of refreshment? The prejudice of other nations is distressing; and as for their ignorance, why, I don't suppose Italy and Germany have ever heard of the ocarina and the jew's harp."*<sup>201</sup>

Such trashing of the German and Anglo-German concertina and its players extended to fine art. A 1921 sculpture entitled "The Concertina Man" by an artist named Dobson was reviewed in the *Times*: "This is almost a caricature of an East-ender in the ecstasy of drawing his Cockney music out of his Cockney instrument. It is a nude, because that ecstasy could not be expressed in clothed limbs; but all detail is lost in the grotesque rapture. It is, in fact, a comic dance."<sup>202</sup>

Nor were musicians in rural areas excepted from the scorn of the upper crust. Although in modern times "traditional" music is generally regarded with some respect, nearly all occurrences in Victorian print were regarded with either mocking derision or complaint, or both. Few are as scathing as this one:

*I suppose every village in England has its musical idiot. And in writing of this musical heritage of ours, I do not write with cynicism or from any superior attitude. . . . The typical musical idiot is a harmless, lovable creature, born with an ear for melody and with a head as full of tunes as a barrel organ. He is as happy with this concertina or with his mouth organ as David, King of Israel, with his harp. The musical idiot of the village is a mystery to everyone, including his mother. "I dunno where 'e takes it from," she will say with happy frankness, "neither his father nor me never knew one tune*

from another. But 'e plays lovely. Always 'as since 'e was a little chap."<sup>203</sup>

It took the efforts of Cecil Sharp and his contemporaries in the first English folk revival in the early twentieth century to partly turn around the ignorant attitude of the highbrow elitists, and that of the journalists who wrote for them, toward their own national music heritage. For their part, the recipients of such musical and social criticism typically let it ride, as Reg Hall has observed:

*The gentry, in the view of some working people, were divided into the good and the bad, those who were decent and knew their social responsibilities, even if they were patronizing, and the nouveau riche who were tight-fisted, elitist and inconsiderate to tenants and employees.*

*(Quote from) Arch Sherlock: Some of them were gentlemen. Some were real people; others were nothing but bloody gasbags. And that's what the trouble was. Those that came up from nothing and made theirselves the worst people there are. The people that are landed gentry are the best people there are. . . . Not hardly any of 'em left.*<sup>204</sup>

#### On a lighter note: humor and the concertina

Not all criticism of the Anglo was ill-tempered, however, and the concertina was subjected to much good-natured humor, as in this 1887 bit of doggerel:

#### Music Hath Charms

("Our chief musical curse is the **concertina**."—*The Echo*.)

"From harmony, from heavenly harmony,  
The universal frame began," and musical man, From  
the far-distant aeons,  
Has raised his proud paeans  
To the twang of the harp or the light guitar,  
The luscious lute and the silvery flute;  
While the big drum's bang resounds afar,  
And the piccolo's squeak and the cornet's toot  
Have been a musical charm for ravished ears,  
But the amateur starts 'midst doubt and fears  
When the terrible form of "Our 'Arry" appears,  
Waving a **concertina**!

We've heard street-organs with a heart resigned To  
the law if unmovable fate;  
As the German band's *poom-ta* was borne on the  
wind,  
We have cried, we have moaned, "We must wait;"  
We've heard fiddle-learners with tranquil mind,  
Resolved we would not grow irate.  
We've danced the "See-saw" waltz nightly at parties  
and balls,  
Heard scores, with all the notes false, of "Over the  
Garden Walls;"  
We've waited while young Mr. Scorchers obliged with  
a violin solo,  
Our ears we let suffer the torture of hearing Signor  
Smitherolo.  
We'd welcome these sounds altogether, rather than  
evermore weather  
The storm raised by human hyenas—the fiends who  
"affect" **concertinas**!<sup>205</sup>

Concertinas, usually the German variety, were sometimes used as props in satirical pieces, symbolizing German government policies, or Anglo-German agreements, or such. The following piece, from Punch in 1890, skewers an Anglo-German Agreement between the two governments (also see the accompanying Figure 93):



The Anglo-German Concertina.

*"I confess I was not at all prepared for the feelings that some South Africans appear to entertain with respect to our conduct in the recent negotiations"*  
—Lord Salisbury, to the Deputation of African Merchants respecting the proposed Anglo-German Agreement.

I fancied that this Instrument  
Would make a great sensation  
And that its music would content  
The critics and the nation,  
I know it is what vulgar folks  
Christen the "Constant-screamer;"  
I thought you'd scorn such feeble jokes;  
It seems I was a dreamer.  
You writhe your lips, you close your ears!  
Dear me! Such conduct tries me.  
You do not like it, it appears  
Well, well,—you do surprise me!

'Tis not, I know, the Jingo drum,  
Nor the "Imperial" trumpet.  
(The country to their call won't come,  
However much you stomp it.)  
They're out of fashion; 'tis not now  
As in the days of "BEAKEY."  
People dislike the Drum's tow-row.  
And call the Trumpet squeaky.  
So I the Concertina try,  
As valued friends advise me.  
What's that you say? It's all my eye?  
Well, well,—you do surprise me!

I fancied you would like it much  
You and the other fellows.  
Admire the tone, remark my touch!  
And what capacious bellows!  
'Tis not as loud as a trombone,  
But harmony's not rumpus;  
The chords are charming, and you'll own  
It has a pretty compass.  
I swing like this, I sway like that!  
Fate a fine theme supplies me!  
The "treatment" you think feeble, flat?  
Well, well,—you *do* surprise me!

The "European Concert"? Grand!  
(You recollect that term, man!)  
This is a Concertina, and  
It's make is Anglo-German,  
You can't expect the thing to be

English alone, completely;  
But really, as 'tis played by me.  
Does it not sound most sweetly?  
Humph! DONALD CURRIE cocks his nose,  
BECKETT disdainfully eyes me,  
My Concertina you would—close!  
Well, well—you do surprise me!<sup>206</sup>



Figure 93. Political satire using the concertina as a proxy for a recent Anglo-German political agreement. "What? You do not like the tone of it? Why, you do surprise me!!!" See text for complete verses. From *Punch*, 1890.

Buskers on trains were not spared the sharp wit of would-be poets, as in this comic verse of 1886, meant to be sung to the tune of Thomas Moore's immortal *The Minstrel Boy*:

# The Minstrel Boy.

The minstrel boy in the train has gone,  
In the third class you will find him.  
His *concertina* he plays upon,  
Or the fiddle hangs behind him;  
"Child of Song," cries the railway-guard,  
"Though bobbies oft betray thee,  
The Underground will thee reward,  
These foolish folk will play thee."

The Minstrel entered the railway train,  
But a rival knocked him under.  
Causing the Child of Song much pain,  
And his fiddle broke asunder.  
And said, "Go back to your own cuntrye,  
Thou dupe of Italian knavery;  
Music was made for the brave and free;  
And not to be used for slavery."<sup>207</sup>

A Bangor, Wales, newspaper of 1892 carried this story:

*In response to a recent advertisement in a Liverpool paper for a merchant's clerk who could write and speak German, a braw young youth presented himself before the principal of the firm as a candidate. In response to the merchant's query as to whether he could speak and write German came the apologetic reply, "No, Sir; but I have a brother who plays the German concertina."*<sup>208</sup>

The journal *Musical World*, in 1869, carried a writer's reminiscences of a musical donkey:

"I knew musical pleasure experienced by a donkey, whenever a concertina was played. It was discovered by accident; but was utilized by the animal's master. For the donkey was accustomed to browse in a meadow which opened into a coppice . . . [where] it was rather a difficult task to discover him when wanted. Having found that the animal was fond of music . . . instead of a long search for him, a *concertina*

was brought out of the house and played, when, in a few minutes, out of the coppice would come the donkey, racing along with tail erect, and braying melodiously meanwhile. He would then allow himself to be saddled."

*We believe this is the first instance on record of a four-footed donkey showing any preference for the instrument in question.*<sup>209</sup>



Figure 94. Cartoon from *Punch*, June 1868.



Figure 95. Seaside postcard depicting an indignant man railing against a singing couple with a concertina. From the collection of Stephen Chambers.



Figure 96. From an old postcard, ca. 1910.

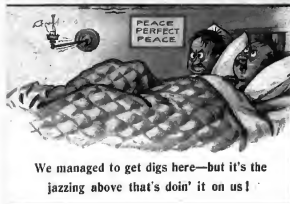


Figure 97. "The Charity Concert," an English postcard, ca. 1910. With thanks to Alan Day.



## Decline and Revival

### World War I, a last hurrah

In many ways, the World War brought to a close the extended Victorian era: politics, policies, and social customs in England all changed during and after its tragic carnage. For the Anglo-German concertina, the war was a last hurrah, but of a different sort. Where the concertina had previously been seen by many journalists and other writers as a questionable and noisome habit of the working class, it and its performers were depicted during the war in a much more favorable light. Writers portrayed it as a unifying influence and a part of what was good about England, and described the concertina as a favorite of soldiers on the front line. After the war, however, all this was to change in a rush to modernization; the Great War was the concertina's swan song.

As the war began, the concertina was frequently observed among soldiers and sailors (Figure 98), and media treatment became uncharacteristically positive, as the next several excerpts make clear. In Crewe, Cheshire in January 1915, young troops await shipment to the front:

*Although the strain of discipline is relaxed, the general conduct is admirable. . . . There was not a single case of drunkenness on New Year's Eve. The soldiers are never tired of singing "Tipperary," to the strains of a concertina. The sailors dance away the time of waiting.*<sup>210</sup>

Once at the front in France, that same year, troops waited eagerly for letters from home:

*Apart from the post, there is music, which is the mouth-organ and concertina, and your voice must be bad indeed if it is not welcome in an old ballad, or in music-hall impudence, in billets. Concerts are common, and go with a zest unknown at home. Any old thing does, and the worse it is the better, because one may laugh with the less restraint.*<sup>211</sup>



Figure 98. Soldier and sailor musicians, one with Anglo concertina, ca. 1915. The sailor with the mandolin is David Jacob Blazer of the Royal Navy, who also played Anglo, during and after the war. With thanks to [www.maxalding.co.uk](http://www.maxalding.co.uk).

A Wesleyan minister at the front in France, writing in *The Times*, noted that:

*The section to which we are attached is very musical, and last night entertained us to a really good concert. The only musical instrument we possess—besides mouth-organs—is a concertina, but we get plenty of it.*<sup>212</sup>

At Tilbury dock in the Thames estuary, also in 1915:

*To the strains of "Auld Lang Syne," played on a concertina by a merry-faced British soldier, and answering volleys of cheers from a great crowd on the quay, the Flushing boat Oranje-Nassau berthed at Tilbury dock this afternoon. They were wounded British soldiers, and members of the R.A.M.C., who, until two days ago, were in German camps and prisons, where some of them had been since the battle of Mons.*<sup>213</sup>

A different account of that same docking provides some additional detail:

*The gaily-painted ship—she was the S.S. Oranje-Nassau—came almost merrily in to the enlivening strains of a concertina played with the touch of the true musician by a Tommy with only one leg, but the rest of him serviceable enough. "Tipperary" was the tune; it was followed by "God Save the King" as the Nassau berthed. Everybody on ship and shore joined in, and then one giant Irishman heaved his crutch down amid the throng as he hopped to the rail.*

*"Here we are again, bhoy!! he cried. "Many happy returns from Germany--bad cess to the country! We may be cripples, but are we downhearted?"*

*"No!" roared the invalids, and to prove it the gentleman with the concertina jiggled off into a lively dance tune, to which the business of disembarking proceeded cheerfully enough.<sup>214</sup>*

In France near the front, a chaplain wrote:

*As a farewell to M. we have had this evening a very jolly little sing-along in a large barn billet partly occupied by part of "C" company. A big acetylene lamp was fixed up on a stage; the effect was weird but homely. No piano was available, the only music being a concertina accompaniment to a clog dance. One man recited thrilling tragedies with ventriloquist changes of his voice, and he held the audience spellbound.<sup>215</sup>*

One of these concertina-playing soldiers was a brother of Sussex concertina player Scan Tester, Will Tester, who:

*served in France as a wireless operator and line layer in the Royal Engineers . . . [H]e received a concertina from his family, but it was lost when he had to leave everything suddenly in the advance to Germany in 1918. Then he bought a bandoneon from a German soldier who had lost a hand and could no longer play it. This bandoneon, with a fingering system not unlike an*

*Anglo-German concertina, was to feature prominently in the Tester family music-making over the next few years.<sup>216</sup>*

A soldier recalled an experience in France in 1917 that underscored a growing affection to concertina music during the war:

*One night, strolling outside my own billet and wandering down the lane a way, I heard the sound of singing coming from a brick barn on the roadside. I stood close under the blank wall at the back of the building, and listened. The men were singing "Auld Lang Syne" to the accompaniment of a concertina and a mouth-organ. They were taking parts, and the old tune—so strange to hear out in a village in France, in the war zone—sounded very well, with deep-throated harmonies. Presently the concertina changed its tune, and the men of the New Army sang "God Save the King." I heard it sung a thousand times or more on royal festivals and tours, but listening to it then from that dark old barn in Flanders, where a number of "K.'s men" lay on the straw a night or two away from the ordeal of advanced trenches, in which they had to take their turn, I heard it with more emotion than ever before. In that anthem, chanted by these boys in the darkness, was the spirit of England.<sup>217</sup>*

In time of war, the Anglo-German concertina could be celebrated for what it had become: a national instrument. No more was there carping from the national press about its horrid working-class sound, because these working-class soldiers were fighting for England. Another part of this change in attitude about the concertina was perhaps due to the efforts of Cecil Sharp, Maud Karpeles, Mary Neal and others in the first British folk revival, which began in the decade preceding the war. These folk musicologists emphasized the national character of previously undervalued customs like country dancing and morris dancing. William Kimber's active role in these activities helped spread the idea that the music of the Anglo-German concertina consisted of more than music hall



Figure 99. *God Save the Queen*, from C. Roylance's *How to Learn the Chromatic Anglo-German Concertina*, 1878. With thanks to Randall Merris.



Figure 100. British World War I poster, with the caption: "The Underground Railways of London, knowing how many of their passengers are now engaged in important business in France and other parts of the world, send out this reminder of home." It featured a concertina player. With thanks to the ASIFA-Hollywood Animation Archive.

Figure 101. Banjo and concertina sing-along, western front, World War I. The concertina player is seated to the right of the banjo player. See text for expanded caption. With thanks to *Concertina & Squeezebox Magazine*, 1987.



ditties sung by a lamppost at 3 a.m. A poster issued by the London underground railways captured this connection between the now-beloved—or at least somewhat respected—Anglo-German concertina and England (Figure 100).

In a 1917 publication, “How to entertain in Camp and Hospital,” its author clearly describes what the soldiers wanted to hear:

*So far as instrumental music is concerned, the banjo and concertina seem to take first place in soldiers' and sailors' affections. The violin, too, is always popular with them, provided the choice falls on a medley of well-known airs. . . . [A]fter what I have seen I am certain of my facts when I say that, whether in Blighty or Somewhere in France, it is the old folk-songs, the simple ditty with a chorus, that get right there—the lines that speak of “Love” and the “Old Folks at Home,” “The Old Kit-bag” that they carried on “The Long, Long Trail,” while in their mind's eye they saw “The Home Fires Burning.” . . . May I press the main point home once more? The concerts should not be arranged so that the singer can use the songs he likes best, or those that show off his voice, perhaps, to the best advantage. Too often—although they are really our guests—we forget we are there to entertain them.*<sup>218</sup>

This account, published in *The Musical Herald*, was a far cry from the calls for better, more progressive classical music for the “village musical idiots” that marked much of Victorian reportage in that and other musical journals. Society was indeed becoming more progressive.

The American branch of the Salvation Army sent girls to the front to serve doughnuts and soup to soldiers at the front, in the last year of the war. William Booth's daughter Eva Booth, their leader and no stranger to the Anglo-German concertina, wrote of a group attached to the Sixth Field Artillery:

*The smoke in that kitchen was awful and continuous from the old field range. The girls often made doughnuts out-of-doors, and they got chilblains from standing in the snow. All the*

*company had chilblains, too, and it was a sorry crowd. . . . There was only one way to have meetings in that place and that was while the men were lined up for chow near to the canteen. They would start to sing in the gloomy, cold room, the men and girls all with their overcoats on, and fingers so cold that they could hardly play the **concertina**, for there was no fire in the big room save from the range at one end where they cooked. Then the girls would talk to them while they were eating. Perhaps they did not call these meetings, but they were a mighty happy time to the men, and they liked it.*<sup>219</sup>

Salvation Army musical groups were active at many sites along the front, as the news photograph in Figure 101 shows. Its extended caption reads:

*Here on the Western Front, amid the camp debris, the war is forgotten for the moment while a sing-song with a scratch banjo and vociferous chorus is held. The leader of the band is an officer of the Salvation Army, who at the moment is giving a solo on the banjo; but when the full orchestra accompanies the singing his efforts will be supplemented by a **concertina** and a guitar.*<sup>220</sup>

At war's end, the concertina could be found at Armistice celebrations in Paris (Figure 103). In London streets, delirious street celebrations ensued that may have been the last significant street concertina playing in a long history of that in London:

*There were dancing processions—scores of girls and young men holding arms or waists—and dancing groups and squads and bunches, from single couples to dozens and scores. It was primitive “dancing”—simply jigging to and fro and backwards and forwards, or hopping around on one leg to snatches of tunes on mouth organs and **concertinas**, and accompanied by the blowing of whistles, the ringing of bells, the beating of all kinds of substitutes for drums.*<sup>221</sup>

Even after the war, the little concertina had a part to play, albeit at the dubious hands of spirit



Figure 103. Celebrating Armistice Day, Paris, 1918. From A.J.P. Taylor's *The First World War, An Illustrated History*, 1965.

mediums, who profited on the anguish of relatives and loved ones of fallen troops, as this fictional account suggests:

*"The preparations, as you see, are very simple," he added, still addressing himself to Mrs. Marden.*

*"Yes," she said, almost in a whisper. She was thinking, "And very absurd!" tragically, not with any sense of humour. The sight of the rattle, the **concertina**, and the tambourine with its bells made her feel almost sick. How Ronald would have laughed at it all! But she hated it, because he was falling into decay somewhere in France, and she was in this room with these people because of just that.*<sup>222</sup>



Figure 102. "When you're done sharpening your voice up, I'll borrow it to peel the 'aters with." World War I cartoon; with thanks to *Concertina & Squeezebbox Magazine*, 1987, and Neil Wayne.



## Post-war decline

During the war, a woman's suffragette newspaper, *Votes for Women*, suggested that things would be different in England after the war, and linked the Anglo-German concertina to things that should not remain the same. The adjacent political cartoon (Figure 104), entitled *New Songs For Old*, shows a woman sending away a street musician with a concertina. The caption reads:

*Singer (sings): "Sing me the de-ear old songs of de-ear old Eng-e-land..."*

*Woman (sending him away): "Oh, go into the next street, do! We women mean to have a new song and a new England when the War is over."*



Figure 104. Women's newspaper of 1915, showing a suffragette—who wished to hear a new song after the war—sending away a concertina-playing street musician. From the collection of Stephen Chambers.

The cartoon was an accurate prediction of coming reality. A generational shift occurred after the War, and usage of Anglo-German concertinas dropped precipitously. In England, of course, many concertina-playing soldiers never returned from the front. But sales of instruments and tutors had been dropping steeply even before the war (see discussion and charts, Chapter 1). The introduction of gramophones had hurt sales of all popular musical instruments when they became widely available in the second decade of the twentieth century.

Perhaps the most significant reason for the decline of the Anglo, however, came from changes in popular music and dance. For centuries, western European folk music had been largely diatonic: each tune used only the seven notes of the major scale. This meant that the harmonica, and later Uhlig's first one-row concertina, could play almost any dance tune, if it was placed in the home key of that instrument. The typical German or Anglo-German concertina in Victorian time had two rows, so one had a choice of two keys (C and G) but little more chromatic ability than that afforded by one G sharp. Around the beginning of the twentieth century, a new form of popular music arrived, from the melting pots of American cities. Starting with ragtime, and accelerating with jazz and the blues, this music completely disregarded the confines of the diatonic seven-note major scale. This more chromatic music, with its new rhythmic patterns and a penchant for improvisation, took the world of popular music, including that in England, by storm. As a double-whammy, the dances attached to popular music also changed. Polkas and schottisches disappeared almost overnight among trendsetters, to be replaced by such new fare as the foxtrot, the Charleston, and the Lindy Hop.

These new, more chromatic tunes began to appear in English music halls and musical theatre. A good example is *Waiting on the Robert E Lee*, a large minstrel-style production number from the musical

theatre, composed by American ragtime pianist Lewis F. Muir (1884-1950) in 1912 and popularized by blackface singer Al Jolson. It was a big hit in both America and England, and London's Francis and Day publishing house, which had been churning out Anglo-German concertina tutors for decades, dutifully placed the tune in its 1920 updated tutor. To do so, however, they had to modify the tune, to its detriment. A comparison of their version with the original (Figure 105) shows the severe difficulties faced by the Anglo-German concertina in a newly chromatic musical world.

A portion of the chorus is shown. The tune is written in the key of F, and intended to be played entirely on the C row of the two-row concertina. In measure five, the concertina lacks a necessary D#, and the troubles begin. In measure 8, the concertina lacks a D# for a brief

chromatic run. More significantly, the repeated blues riff starting at the end of measure 12 lacks a critical G#, and a lead-in chromatic run to the next phrase (measure sixteen) lacks a B flat. This little repeated blues riff was one of the "hooks" in the song, and part of what made it so memorable and different to early twentieth-century ears. Francis and Day's arrangement fell short of the mark, and anyone playing that tune would know that it had been simplified to fit an instrument that otherwise could not play the song—in one tune, three needed accidentals (D#, G#, and B flat) were not available. It did not matter that a superb player like Fred Kilroy (more regarding him later) could play this tune perfectly on a fully chromatic 38-key Jeffries Anglo, because the average player with his or her 20-key instrument could not, and there lay the bulk of the market.

Figure 105. A portion of the chorus of *Waiting on the Robert E. Lee*, a popular minstrel song by L. Wolfe Gilbert and Lewis Muir from 1912, showing a comparison of the tune as arranged for a 20-key two-row German system concertina in Francis and Day's *Concertina Tutor and Book of Popular Songs and Ballads*, ca. 1920 (upper staff) with the melody of the original 1912 version for piano (lower staff). Newly chromatic pieces emerging from ragtime and jazz influences doomed the two-row concertina's use for popular music. See text for explanation.

Even though many players did have 30-key “chromatic” instruments at this time, for most of them the chromatic passages awkwardly interrupted the rhythm of their along-the-row playing, suited as it was to the diatonic tunes that heretofore had dominated popular music. At this time, in the first two decades of the twentieth century, the torch of the “average working-class person’s instrument” was passed from the Anglo-German concertina to the guitar and the ukulele, both of which excelled at these new, more chromatic styles (e.g., see discussion accompanying Figure 12 of Chapter 8). When the Anglo returned in the late twentieth century “concertina revival,” it was as a *folk* instrument, not as an instrument for popular music, as it had always been.

Some players gamely persisted with the new music. In particular, Scan Tester’s *Tester’s Imperial* jazz band played many of these tunes. Available recordings show that he dropped many of the chromatic notes, however, and made up the difference with his verve and superb phrasing. In a rural Sussex pub, such minor alterations could be overlooked, but on the stages of London such would not fly.

The instrument’s name was also a casualty; the term “German” was quietly dropped from the name Anglo-German after the war, perhaps due to bad feelings created by the tragic loss of so many of the nation’s soldiers; the instrument was thereafter known solely by the term “Anglo” in all published tutors and advertisements (see Chapter 1). Although the major English makers (Wheatstone, Lachenal, Jeffries, and Crabb) continued to build them, sales dropped off. The largest maker, Lachenal’s, closed in the middle 1930s. Ironically, the fully chromatic English concertina saw a rebirth of sorts in the early twentieth century as it replaced the Anglo in concertina bands of both the Salvation Army and the industrial north. For most people, the Anglo became only a memory.

### The last of their kind: players in the lean years

Amid the steep decline in usage of the Anglo concertina after World War, a few aging

players continued with the instrument, such as the unknown player from south London shown in Figure 106. The lean years for the instrument extended from the 1920s through the 1950s, during which few recordings were made of concertina players, and few mentions of their comings and goings appeared in the press. Unfortunately, that meant that most of the aging remnants of the Anglo concertina’s heyday in England went unrecorded—unlike Australia, where a vigorous project started by collector John Meredith in the 1950s resulted in a large number of field recordings of the old “bush” concertina players there. In England, a few recordings of William Kimber and Scan Tester were made, as well as a small handful of field recordings of players like Fred Kilroy, Ellis Marshall, and Les Rice—and that is just about all there is to be found today in England, for the country where the Anglo-German concertina made its appearance and its strongest stand.



Figure 106. Unknown Anglo concertina player with his wife, in Tooting, south London, 1937. With thanks to Roger Digby.

In this section we shall consider a few of the Anglo players who were born and raised during the Anglo's heyday and who continued to play during the lean years, forming a bridge to players in our own times. Most of these surviving players led quiet lives, and except for those few mentioned above, they were never recorded either in sound or words. Of the group discussed below, all played high-quality English-made Anglo concertinas. For the most part, these accomplished musicians would naturally use the best instruments that they could possibly afford, and of course after World War I imports of German-made instruments became increasingly rare. These musicians, taken as a group, constitute our closest link to what the Anglo-German concertina sounded like during its heyday, and it is worth reflecting upon their playing techniques and styles.

**William Kimber Jr. (1872-1961)**, the prominent Headington Quarry morris dancer and concertina player was briefly described above in the section on the concertina in morris dancing. After World War I, in which his son was seriously injured, Kimber continued his activities with Cecil Sharp and the morris revival, especially in the Oxford region. The English Folk Dance Society awarded him its Gold Badge in 1923, and after Sharp's death Kimber continued to be active in that society. A brickmason by trade, he helped lay the foundation of the new EFDS building in London in 1929. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s he played his concertina for concerts and for occasional programs on the BBC. He made most of his recordings for the HMV label at this time (in 1935, 1947, and 1948). He was present at the founding of the Morris Ring in 1934, and was active with that group too for many years (Figure 107). A revival of the Headington Quarry morris side in the late 1940s led to another two decades of playing for that side. He played at the diamond jubilee in 1959 of the Boxing Day meeting with Cecil Sharp in 1899 that had started the morris revival. His death in 1961 was widely reported in national newspapers. He had lived a long and purposeful life and is easily the most remembered of all Anglo players in England.<sup>224</sup>

An EFDSS CD of 1999, *Absolutely Classic*, has made Kimber's music available to a new



Figure 107. William Kimber at the Bedford Morris Ring meeting of 1950. From the Morris Ring Archives, W. Fisher Cassie, photographer.

generation of Anglo players, and an extensive study of his playing technique can be found in the EFDSS book of 2005, *The Anglo-Concertina Music of William Kimber*. Two of Kimber's morris tunes, *Double Lead Through* and *Bacca Pipes*, are included in the transcriptions of early players in Chapter 10. Kimber's playing style emphasized a right hand melody, precisely played with little embellishment, and a left-hand chorded accompaniment. At core an octave player, Kimber moved his two hands in unison, an octave apart, with the right hand playing notes an octave higher than the left. (Basics of the octave playing technique are explained in Chapter 10.) His style is more specifically termed *two-row* octave playing, meaning that he played individual phrases in a tune in, say, the key of C on both the C and the G rows, as fit the phrasing and pitch. Beyond that simple technique, however, Kimber moved well beyond simple

octave playing. He often dropped every other left hand octave note to emphasize the beat; this is very well represented in his playing of *Bacca Pipes*. He typically added partial chords to the remaining octave notes, by adding a third interval note either above or below the octave note on the left hand. Full chords—often involving both hands—were usually used only to punctuate the ends of phrases. The octave notes and the partial chords helped the concertina music cut through the din of crowd noise and morris bells.

Kimber played almost exclusively on the bottom two rows of his three-row Jeffries C/G Anglo, which probably reflects the fact that he began playing on a two-row instrument, the most common model available in his youth. Kimber's playing is heavily push-and-pull, which adds greatly to its "lift" for dancing. His brisk, staccato octave-plus chording accompaniment reflects the need to provide clear and audible rhythm for dancers—not only those of the morris but for country dance, for which he also played, in the days before electric amplification.<sup>225</sup> Both melody and accompaniment were played briskly and punctually. There was no "playing late," nor was his typical accompaniment of an "oom-pah" nature. The latter technique, common among modern Anglo players, appears to have developed after Kimber's prime, when melodeon players gained prominence in the morris.

**Scan Tester** (1887-1972), Sussex concertina and fiddle player, was described above in his activities with step dancing and pub playing. After the Great War, he formed a family band, *Tester's Imperial*, with his daughter Daisy on piano and his wife Sarah on drums. Occasionally Scan's brother Will Tester, who had carried his concertina into the front during the Great War, played with the group. Playing mostly in Sussex, the *Imperial* was a "jazz" band with a large repertoire of schottisches, polkas, foxtrots, quicksteps, and waltzes. They were quick to pick up the latest dance tunes from their wireless set or from recordings; there was no exclusive adherence to old traditional dance forms here. After the band stopped performing in 1931, Scan and Will Tester continued playing in pubs of the

surrounding region, albeit sporadically. By the 1950s, Scan was "discovered" by Hoathly singer Mervyn Plunkett and melodeon player Reg Hall, who increasingly drew Scan into a series of activities surrounding a revived interest in country pub music (Figure 88). At this time, few in the London folk revival scene had heard the old waltzes, polkas, and schottisches of country pub music, and Scan and his repertoire of old tunes attracted great interest (his early-twentieth-century jazz dance tunes less so). During this time, tape recordings that were informally made at some of his favorite pubs captured his playing. Reg Hall prepared a collection of these recordings, as well as an extensive biography, published in 1990.<sup>226</sup>

Scan Tester played predominantly in an octave style; this he seems to have learned from his older brother Trayton, although Scan heard other (apparently much less accomplished) Sussex players in his early days. As Reg Hall wrote:

*Trayton was in the right position to have been the one who adapted the Fairwarp fiddle stepdance tunes for the concertina. The articulated melody line, dressed by triplets and fill-ins between phrases and underlined by parallel octaves (the two notes of each octave played on different sides of the concertina), and harmony represented by the odd, almost accidental use of thirds in place of octaves, characterize the Tester style. These techniques, together with the lift generated by the attack, staccato notes, the sharp intake of air in the bellows, and the heavy punctuation at the end of an eight bar phrase, were, in all probability, Trayton's gift to his younger brothers.*<sup>227</sup>

Two of Scan Tester's tunes are included as transcriptions in Chapter 10: *Scan Tester's Schottische* and a music hall song, *Roamin' in the Gloamin'*. In both Tester fully employs the octave technique. The schottische is played entirely on the C row. In measure seven he runs into difficulty when the tune climbs high in its compass of notes: the upper octave climbs too high for the C row. In situations like this the player has two choices. Tester's choice was to

drop an octave down for the remainder of the climb in that measure, thereby remaining on the C row. The other choice, which a player like William Kimber, or Dooley Chapman in Australia would take, would be to move the higher phrase to the G row. This choice shows the difference between a single-row octave player and a two-row octave player and, in this tune, Tester represents the former.

*Roamin' in the Gloamin'* is a music hall song written by Harry Lauder in 1911. A good example of the type of music that arrived in the early twentieth century, it has a brief chromatic run in the tenth measure. Such phrases were often the "hooks" in these early twentieth-century pieces. Tester plays it entirely on the C row, with the exception of the F#s needed for the chromatic runs. He adds a considerable number of partial and full chords to this piece, not as separate oom-pahs, as is the fashion with many English players these days, but as simple added thirds and fifths to the lower octave. The tape recording shows that with this simple playing of the piece he held his audience in rapt attention as they sang along. There is no elaborate arrangement of complex left hand chords, and neither is there a piano or a guitar "interpreting" the background chords for him. Others of his time and earlier probably used a similar style as solo players in pubs and minor music halls. Our modern ears have come to expect music with elaborate and sometimes smothering chord arrangements, but Victorian ears could do without.

Scan Tester's octave playing technique was well adapted for use in for dances and sing-songs in noisy pubs in the years before amplification. In this he was in synch with old time players in Australia, recorded by folklorists, all of whom played in the octave style for rural dances (see Chapters 7 and 10). Many of the players for rural dances in Boer South Africa (see Chapters 5 and 10) used a similar technique, although they added more partial chords to their basic octave melodies than did Tester. As was discussed above, Anglo concertina players in Salvation Army bands played in octaves, as surviving sheet music documents (see Figures 58 and 59). Finally, as

we shall see in the next chapter, the octave technique seems to have been a standard one in Ireland in the years before the arrival of public dance halls.

When the jazz age arrived, Tester did not shy away from new jazz dance tunes, but would occasionally drop some of the chromatic notes for ease of playing; the rhythm was clearly of more importance than melody. Somewhat like Kimber, his approach was mostly of the push-and-pull style, emphasizing the extra punch given by frequent changes in bellows direction.

**Charles Alfred West** (1870-1955) was born at Brighton Sussex, where his father was a coal dealer. He learned to play a two-row, Anglo-German concertina by his twenties, when he was photographed with it in a family portrait (Figure 108). In the years before World War I he became a professional busker, playing the beach and the adjacent promenade in this resort town.<sup>228</sup> Tom Bridger, another concertina player, was his musical associate there for many years. Figure 109 shows West at Brighton, holding a concertina, with a friend, who may be Bridger.

Scan Tester knew West, and, according to Reg Hall, the three of them played a regular pitch there in the last years before World War I. They played the beach together by day, and then split up to play the pubs at night. Scan held West and Bridger in high esteem:

*You see, them blokes what I used to play with, of course, they knew music; they played off of concertina music to learn the tunes. Well, then I used to learn them off of them, 'cause there was three of us, and I used to follow them two along. . . . They was jolly good players. Tom Bridger and (Charlie) West. He brought up a family of ten playing on the beach. They never used to do nothing only play on the beach and in the pub. They played Anglos, only they always played B Flats. I don't know why.*<sup>229</sup>

Scan stopped going out with them in 1919, and later said of that decision, "I was a bloody fool to stop." No recordings of West or Bridger are known.



Figure 108. Family photograph of 1895, with Charles West seated at lower left, holding a two-row Anglo-German concertina. His future wife, Beatrice Baldey, is seated next to him. With thanks to West descendant Peter N. Jones.



Figure 109. Charles West, left, perhaps with his associate Tom Bridger, on the beach at Brighton where they worked together for many years in the early twentieth century. With thanks to Peter N. Jones.

**Fred Kilroy** (ca. 1910-ca. 1976) played for morris and other dance groups in the Oldham Lancashire region, as discussed above. Born in Royton, near Oldham, he learned to play in the late 1920s, at a time when Lancashire was alive with concertina bands, and when music halls featured accomplished duet players. He picked up a two-row Anglo-German concertina as a child, later trading it in for a larger model. As a teenager he joined five concertina players, some others who played “bazookas” (a kazoo attached to a horn), and a drummer in the Westwood Jazz Band, playing for local dances. He also played for a girl’s dance team and later with this brother Charlie (also a concertina player) for the Westwood Prize Morris Dancers (Figure 110), a girls’ team. By the 1950s he was playing for his

home town Royton’s revival men’s morris side, as well as for the Manley side during their tour of Ireland in 1958. His musical career was cut short by breathing problems brought on by electrical work in and around a foundry. Retired, he was active in folk revival appearances during his last decade, the 1970s.<sup>230</sup>



Figure 110. Fred Kilroy in 1929. With thanks to Alan Ward and *Musical Tradition*.

Kilroy was recorded only on homemade tapes, and until recently his music has been not commercially available. The *Anglo International* collection of 2005 includes three tracks of his playing.<sup>231</sup> Kilroy’s playing style is dramatically different from either Kimber’s or Tester’s. He admired the Maccann duet and purchased one early in his playing years, but in the press of money-making appearances with his Anglo he gave up on learning the duet. Nonetheless his approach to the Anglo used decidedly less of the classic push-pull technique of Kimber and Tester (and most players), as Alan Ward was written:

*Fred’s style is very reminiscent of duet style—he avoids frequent changes of direction on the bellows by fingering the “repeats” on the instrument—and it appears that this was nothing unusual at the time he learned to play. Fred regarded “melodeon style” (push-pull) players as under-developed.*<sup>232</sup>



That search for “repeats” entails cross-row fingering. A *British Pathe* newsreel, with sound, of a Newcastle miner sword dance team, filmed in 1930, features a miner playing the Anglo in a melodic style (no chording), using generous amounts of cross-row fingering in order to, like Kilroy, minimize bellows changes and maximize a fluid sound.<sup>233</sup> It seems probable that northern England had a wide variety of concertina styles to hear.

Nonetheless, Kilroy’s technique retains much of classic Anglo playing as well, including a tendency toward playing in octaves, like Kimber, Tester, and his Royton morris companion Ellis Marshall (see below). A transcription of one of Fred Kilroy’s tunes, the highly chromatic early-twentieth-century march *Blaze Away*, is included in the transcriptions in Chapter 10. Written in 1901 by Abe Holzman, an American-born, German-educated composer, the tune uses the highly chromatic style that became common in the ragtime era. The tune seems to have been played by Kilroy on a Bb/F instrument in old pitch, and is here transposed for a C/G. On the C/G, it is keyed in F, which tends to be a good choice for highly chromatic pieces like this. Played mostly on the C row, the tune requires frequent cross-row ventures to the outer and inner rows. *Blaze Away* is playable on a typical 30-button Anglo, but not with the fluidity of Kilroy. The extra buttons of his 38-key Jeffries allow more options for playing nearly all notes in either a push or pull direction—especially important in playing chorded pieces with chromatic passages. Unsurprisingly, not only Fred Kilroy but most current South African players who play “modern” chromatic music in a chorded style use expanded keyboard instruments, usually with thirty-eight or more buttons.

The arrival of this sort of highly chromatic music—the chromatic scales of which requires additional development of muscle memory to play—was one of the reasons the Anglo fell on hard times in the early decades of the twentieth century. For the vast majority of players, pieces like this were too difficult to play, or required an

upgrade from the usual 20-button instrument—and yet such music was extremely popular with audiences. Only a few “modernist” Anglo players in England persisted, Fred Kilroy chief among them. In South Africa, Anglo players embraced this new music in much greater numbers, and a sizeable market for 42-button Wheatstone concertinas developed in the early decades of the century (Chapter 5). In recent years, Harry Scurfield, as well as the late Andrew Blakeney-Edwards, have embraced twentieth-century chromatic styles ranging from Scott Joplin rags to Zydeco, but most Anglo players in England are more comfortable playing older, diatonic traditional music forms.

**Ellis Marshall** (1906-1993) was born in Oldham, a Lancashire textile mill town. During his working life, he worked in a textile factory, served as a steward for a working man’s club, and served as a bomb disposal expert during World War II. Marshall learned to play the concertina from Royton morris concertina player Lees Kershaw in the late 1920’s. Kershaw had played with the dancers since 1891. While on the Royton side, Marshall teamed with fellow concertina players Peter McDermott, Norman Coleman, and Fred Kilroy. Ellis Marshall began playing for the Royton morris in 1935, and during this period played for the team that won the English Championships at the Royal Albert Hall in London. Figure 73 shows him, Peter McDermott, and that morris side at that 1936 event. He also played for the Royton revival team of the late 1970s and early 1980s (Figure 111). He was also active in the Oldham Carnival and was with the Royton morris side at the Queen’s Silver Jubilee in 1977.<sup>234</sup>

A recording of Ellis Marshall’s playing from a set of morris dance performances in 1979 has survived, and Marshall’s grandson, Tony Marshall, has donated a copy of it to the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library of the EFDSS. The side’s musicians at that time included Marshall and Norman Coleman on concertina, with a number of drummers. The side danced to a set of tunes starting with the minstrel number *Oh, Susannah*, then included a medley of old tunes

such as *Brighton Camp*, and ended with a cross morris dance. A transcription of the last tune from those tapes, *Cross Morris*, is in the transcriptions of Chapter 10.

Marshall and Coleman, like Scan Tester, played mostly in an octave melodic style on those tapes, as the transcriptions show. Beyond the ubiquitous octave notes, the tune is adorned with a few very simple along-the-row third-interval partial chords—a testament to the simplicity favored by many older players. There is a complete dearth of the oom-pah-like chording favored by revival morris players. The tune is played in a two-row manner. Starting on the C row, it migrates to the G row for higher passages, such as the last half of measures 2, 4, 5, and 6, as well as measures 7-10.



Figure 111. Ellis Marshall in full morris regalia, 1980. Photo courtesy of Tony Marshall, John Cunliffe and Frances Stott.



Figure 112. Eric Holland with 40 button Wheatstone Anglo. Photograph by the late Paul Davies, with thanks to Mark Davies.

**Eric Holland** (1917-1977), of Swanage, Dorset, played a 40-button Wheatstone (Figure 112). Little is known about him before he joined the International Concertina Association in 1964, after which we learn in the ICA minutes that he may have been another player in the fluid style of Fred Kilroy:

*Nov 1966: Tommy Williams tells us that he has a recording of Mr. Holland, of Crows Nest, Dorset, and has never in his life time of experience heard such excellent Anglo playing. Hr. Holland is reported to have a perfect legato phrasing, quite devoid of the jerky accents which are a characteristic of Anglos. Tommy says the sound is indistinguishable from that of a good "English" player. Hr. Holland plays a 40 key Anglo and does not read music.*

*May 1968: Yet another Sound of Music came from Eric Holland, who proved to be an Anglo-player extraordinary. His playing is*

characterised by a strong melody line, with a true legato rarely heard on an Anglo, and a background of delicate accompanying figures. While we had some reservations in respect of his almost continuous forte in the selection and a waltz encore, his subsequent folk dances had excellent piano effects. As a *concertina* player we rate him high; as an Anglo player very high indeed.

Sept 1977: Mr. Holland, of Swanage, Dorset, died on July 15th of a heart attack. Jim Harvey writes: He joined the I.C.A. in January of 1964, but I knew him long before. He was a great friend, and won the "Ear" Players class at the 1975 Festival. He played the Anglo in his own style and produced music more like a *Duet Concertina*. We mourn the loss of a great player and friend.<sup>215</sup>

No commercial recordings are available of Eric Holland. His style, as described, seems similar to that of many modern Boer players, who use expanded-keyboard Anglo concertinas to play in a fluid, heavily cross-row-fingered manner.



Figure 113. Les Rice with Anglo. Photo by Maggie Hunt, with thanks to Veteran Records.

Les Rice lived in the small Dartmoor town of Chagford, Devon (Figure 113). He was an avid and accomplished step dancer, and played the mouth organ and the Anglo concertina in the pubs of Dartmoor along with his cousin Jack Rice, a mouth-organ player. He played in a "jazz band" called the *Chagford Merry-makers* for the town carnival after World War II. A reviewer of his one commercial recording, *Merry-making* (VT144CD), noted that "[Les] was far more flamboyant than Jack and was never happier than when performing in one of the town's inns to an audience of visitors or locals. He played mouthorgan and Anglo concertina and was well known for his old songs. He was also an excellent step dancer and would vie with his cousin Jack for the coveted Dartmoor championship."<sup>216</sup> That recording features Les on three cuts, where he plays in a simple, single-voiced melodic, push-pull style.

Caleb Walker (Figure 114) was born in 1907 in Winnington near Northwich, Cheshire, in a formerly salt-mining area on the Cheshire plain. His life story was recounted by Derek Schofield in *English Dance and Song* in the 1970s, from which this account is summarized. In his early years he worked in cattle farming, and learned to play concertina from his grandfather, "Concertina Bob," a drainer (ditch digger). His grandfather played nearly every evening, and played for dances at the Morley fetes and the Foresters' Ball. These dances included Lancers sets and schottisches, Walker recalled. Caleb Walker played for soul-caking, as discussed above, and for dances, some of which took place outdoors:

*In 1927 or 1928 Hatchmere Lake froze over. It was a yard thick the ice, and it was on for nine weeks. I used to play for dancing on the ice—Skater's Waltz and all that. They used to go fetch me out. I'd play until 2 o'clock in the morning. I was working in the building trade at Runcorn at the time, and I was out of work—everything stopped, you couldn't work; everything was frozen solid. I used to put my hat down. They'd throw in coppers, a few tanners. I didn't get much, but I made some money; every penny counted then.*<sup>217</sup>



Figure 114. Caleb Walker, Cheshire concertina player, in 1983. Photograph by Derek Schofield.

Walker was “discovered” when the revival morris team at Manley needed a musician. At the same time, concertina player George Shannon was recruited; neither had any experience with the morris. Concertina player and dancer Bob McDermott brought knowledge of the Oldham dancers. After a gap during the war, McDermott recruited Fred Kilroy in 1952 to play with the team, so that they would have sufficient volume with all the drummers they had. Of him, Caleb said, “Fred Kilroy was a marvelous player. He knew every note on the concertina . . . he could make it talk.” Kilroy played with the Manley team until 1958.

Walker worked in agriculture, often as a teamsman working with horses, before he retired in 1972. In 1977, a few more new concertina players joined the Manley morris team, among them current player Mark Davies, who learned concertina from Walker. Caleb Walker, like Ellis Marshall and Scan Tester, was an octave-style player, and Mark Davies described his playing as follows:

*Caleb Walker only played in the key of C, playing the tune along the right hand side C row and*

*dropping down to the right hand side G row for the higher notes. He played the roughly corresponding buttons on the left hand side and would often play chords on the left hand side. So basically he was playing in octaves.*

*The Manley concertina players had a unique manner of playing. There could be up to seven concertina players, a bass drum and a side drum in the band. In a carnival procession the dancers and musicians could be marching for up to 2 hours without a break. The concertina players thus held the concertina high almost in front of their faces with the weight of the concertina being taken by the elbows being tucked into the trunk. This in itself was very tiring so at certain stages in various tunes all the concertina players would swing their concertinas in a circle above their heads, making sure they all did this in the same direction to avoid accidents!*<sup>238</sup>

No publically available recordings of Caleb Walker are known.



Figure 115. Bill Gibbons in 1980. Photo by Toni Arthur, with thanks to English Folk Dance and Song Society.

**Bill Gibbons** (b. 1898) was born at Ring O’Bells, near Burscough, Lancashire (Figure 115). In the canal town, he worked with his father on barges on the Leeds and Liverpool Canal. His father played melodeon for clog dancing as well as for

waltzes, and around 1910 he purchased a Wheatstone Anglo for Bill, then twelve years old. Bill Gibbons played hornpipes, old time songs, and music hall songs with his father and, later, on his own. He played for local pace-egggers, a Lancashire tradition: "I used to go into the house first playing the concertina, then they'd march in and take their turns at the song, then they'd dance as well, they'd skip around in their clogs tipping their toes. They all had different costumes, the old lady had a big hat with flowers on, and they'd black their faces as well."<sup>239</sup> No commercial recordings of Gibbons exist.



Figure 116. Walter Savage of Abingdon, Oxfordshire with his wife. With thanks to David Savage.

**Walter (Wal) Savage** (1882-1952) was born in Newark, Nottinghamshire, but lived most of his life in Abingdon, Oxfordshire (Figure 116). He played Anglo for the Abingdon morris side before the Great War, but after the war the side did not regroup. After returning from the war, he played in the pubs of Abingdon and was several times the ceremonial "Mayor of Ock Street" there. He was a farm laborer, an itinerant musician, and a step dancer. His wedding

certificate of 1940 lists his occupation as "minstrel." Toward the end of his life he was playing a wooden-ended 26- or 30-key Jones or Lachenal concertina, using what his grandson described as a simple along-the-rows vamp, with melody on the right, and chords on the left—somewhat similar to William Kimber, also of Oxfordshire, if this description is accurate. There are no recordings of him.<sup>240</sup>

From this small group of ten surviving concertina players from the Anglo's heyday in England, we have recordings of only five. These recordings, along with a chance *British Pathe* newsreel ca. 1930 of an unnamed Newcastle miner<sup>241</sup> are our only aural links to the sound of the Anglo from players who lived at least partly in that era. Of the larger group, all ten were from working-class backgrounds. Many were agricultural or factory workers; several were professional buskers or itinerant musicians. All owned Anglo-German instruments.

#### **Playing styles of musicians in early recordings**

Of the players from this group who were recorded (Kimber, Tester, Kilroy, Marshall, and Rice) some characteristics may be noted:

**Octave playing.** Les Rice was the only player observed to play in a single-note, melody-along-the-row style. The other four players were all octave players to one extent or another, as was Caleb Walker. The need to create volume for dance music seems to have been the main reason for this double-noting. These four have this technique in common with dance musicians in Australia and South Africa, as discussed elsewhere in this volume. They also have this technique in common with the Anglo players in Salvation Army bands, as discussed above (see the sheet music in Figures 58-59, where each part is played purely in octaves). It appears that this technique of playing nearly completely in octaves grew spontaneously with players in different areas. Certainly, Scan Tester's brother Trayton is known to have fallen into octave playing on his own, for example.

**Simple, partial chords.** Of the octave-style players, only William Kimber played using frequent chords throughout his tunes. Kilroy added a moderate amount, and the rest (Tester, Marshall, and, it is reported, Walker) were somewhat sparing in their use of chords. The methods of chording used by this group are fairly simple: Kimber and Kilroy, for example, would typically add an adjacent third interval note to a lower octave note, thereby constructing a partial chord. This technique is greatly different from many modern "revival" players, who disarticulate the left hand from the right, typically first arranging an appropriate oom-pah chord on the left (bass note followed by a 1st, 3rd and 5th interval chord an octave higher, or part thereof), then trying to find an acceptable way of playing the melody on the right hand.

**Cross-row fluid playing.** Two of the younger players from this group, Fred Kilroy and, apparently, Eric Holland, played at times in a fluidly legato style with (at least in the case of Kilroy) numerous chromatic notes. This style appears to be a development of the early twentieth century, and requires extensive cross-row fingering on an instrument with three or more rows. Both of them had extended keyboard concertinas of thirty-eight or more buttons. The Newcastle concertina player of the 1930 newsreel mentioned above, also played in a legato, cross-row-fingered style.

The diversity in style among the members of this small group is to be expected. In the nineteenth century, the relative difficulty of transportation, as well as the lack of sound recordings, practically mandated an explosion of highly personal styles. That more were not recorded represents a great loss.<sup>242</sup> Judging from the recordings of these survivors, the standard of play was generally quite high regardless of the technique played, at least for prominent players.

### The concertina revival in England

The concertina revival that started in England in the 1960s was partly an aftershock of the second British folk revival that started in the

years following World War II. The first folk revival earlier in that century, with Cecil Sharp as the standard-bearer and William Kimber as a leading musician, was an effort in part to re-link urban England with its rural musical heritage. The second folk revival began at approximately the same time as the post-World War II folk revivals in the United States and Australia. In each country this post-World War II revival had instincts that leaned more to the political left than the one in Sharp's time, but in both there was a strong element of romanticism connected with the idea that a country's musical heritage was to be found in the music of simple rural people.

Folk singers Ewan MacColl and A. L. Lloyd were perhaps the most prominent early members of the second British folk revival, and recordings that they made with English-system concertina player Alf Edwards in the early 1960s caused an upsurge in interest in the concertina among young people. Edwards' skillful playing nicely set off English and Scottish folk songs and sea shanties, and these recordings were very popular. By the late 1960s, increased interest in the concertina in folk circles began to be noticed at the meetings of the International Concertina Association. The ICA had been founded in 1952 in London with a membership consisting mainly of English-system and Duet concertina players, many of whom at the time had mixed feelings about folk and popular music. A newsletter of 1967 reports that:

*Harry Crabb tells us that he has sold a concertina to Bob Dylan, the American Folk singer. Also that he was astonished to find how many concertinas were in use in his recent Folk Dance week-end at Keele University.*<sup>243</sup>

Member Gina Mercer, writing in the newsletter the following year, expressed sentiments that were likely held by many at the time in that organization:

*Mrs. Mercer comes down heavily in favor of classics on the concertina. She welcomes folk music as rewarding and very cheerful, but says "pop" debases the concertina to squeeze-box,*

and concludes with "No! A thousand times no!"<sup>244</sup>

Such sentiments reflected the then-continuing social divide between the relatively high-minded English system and duet concertinists and the former working-class Anglo players, of whom there were then few survivors. That situation—both the divide and the lack of Anglo players—was about to change radically. The "concertina revival" that followed had several segments.



Figure 117. Neil Wayne with concertina at Éigse Mrs Crotty, Kiltrush Ireland, 2004. Photograph by Shay Fogarty.

**Free Reed magazine.** Neil Wayne (Figure 117), who by the 1960s was actively interested in concertinas and was collecting them, began a newsletter in 1969 that was eventually named *Free Reed*. It shared information not only on free-reed instruments but also on the revival folk music groups that were beginning to play them. *Free Reed* proclaimed itself "The Magazine of

the Concertina Revival" and ran through 1976. By that time, Wayne had founded Free Reed Records and began to issue, often with Topic Records, recordings of British and Irish concertina players—most of them Anglo players. In particular, his recordings in County Clare played a large role in re-invigorating the concertina in Ireland, the music of which has gained a large following in Britain.



Figure 118. John Kirkpatrick with concertina, ca. 2007. With thanks to John Halliday and the East Anglia Traditional Music Trust.

**Morris dance revival.** The revival of the morris began, of course, with Cecil Sharp's efforts in the early decades of the twentieth century, and later with the foundation of the Morris Ring in 1934, but a second wind arrived during the second British folk revival, as interest grew in traditional music. In particular, Ashley Hutchings's folk-rock recording of 1972, *Morris On*, familiarized a new generation with the music of the morris, albeit in an electrified form. John Kirkpatrick (Figure 118), an Anglo and melodeon player, was a standout among the artists on that album, and generated a great deal of interest in the Anglo concertina. Kirkpatrick, born in 1947 in West London, moved to Shropshire in 1973 and formed a Border Morris group. *Plain Capers*, issued in 1976, was another iconic release of

morris dance tunes, this time played acoustically, with Kirkpatrick, guitarist Martin Carthy, and several other musicians and dancers. John Watcham, of Chingford just northeast of London, started playing Anglo at the age of thirteen for a local revival side, leaving it in 1972 to form the Albion Morris Men. *Son of Morris On*, an immediate follow-up to the earlier *Morris On*, featured his inventive playing. Recordings like these along with the ever-widening circle of revival morris teams attracted many new Anglo concertina players in England and abroad in the 1970s and 1980s.

**English country music.** In the middle twentieth century, beyond the folk clubs and festivals of urban England, what is now called English traditional music was still being played in quiet country pubs. Among Anglo concertina players, however, the roll of old time players declined to almost none after Scan Tester passed away in 1972. A revival of interest in English country music among urban enthusiasts started in the

early 1970s. *Oak* (Figure 119) was an early such revival group. Formed in North London in 1970, they played stripped-down polkas, schottisches, and songs with Anglo concertina, melodeon, and fiddle, using material of English traditional musicians like Scan Tester. Tony Engle was *Oak's* Anglo player; the group was together a brief eighteen months. Two members (Rod and Danny Stradling) eventually founded the *Old Swan Band* in 1974, another significant early English traditional country group, but this time without a concertina.

In 1972, Roger Digby, then of London but living now in Essex, picked up a 30-button Lachenal at the English Folk Dance and Song Society's Cecil Sharp house, and three years later became a founding member of *Flowers and Frolics* (Figure 120), along with several other musicians—on melodeon, banjo, tuba, and percussion—and singers. The group played together for over a decade, and one of its main thrusts was the reconnection of English dance with English music.



Figure 119. The English country music group *Oak* in the early 1970s. Left to right: Rod Stradling, Danny Stradling, Anglo concertina player Tony Engle, and Peta Webb. With thanks to Rod Stradling, *Musical Traditions*.





Figure 120. English country music group *Flowers and Frolics* at the Empress of Russia pub, North London, 1985. Anglo concertina player Roger Digby is second from the right. With thanks to Roger Digby.

The dance revival efforts of groups like EFDSS had at that time largely overlooked the few remaining musicians playing late-nineteenth-century ballroom dance music (polkas, schottisches, et cetera) and older music for step dancing, even though these musicians and their music were still alive in the English countryside. Instead, the dance revivalists seem to have focused on reviving English country dance with large helpings of easy-to-dance imported Irish ceilí dances and American square and contra dances. As Digby mentioned in an interview in 2000:

*In the early '70s the "Social Dance" activity in England was dominated by the view that there was little—if any—traditional English music to go with the traditional English dances that had been notated and therefore these dances were being danced (and I use that word very loosely) to tunes from Ireland and America. The*

*American tunes fitted in with the imported practice of "calling" (not present in the English tradition) but, because they were fast and lacked emphasis, they reduced all the dances to running sets. This is, of course, an overstatement but it is sound nevertheless. What "Flowers" set out to do was put English tunes (many available) and English style (excellent older musicians and recordings of earlier ones were available) back to English dances, using the distinctive rhythmic style of the English country musicians. We were not alone in this: the Old Swan Band from Cheltenham were doing the same and many followers soon came along.<sup>245</sup>*

As if to underscore this, the *Old Swan Band's* first album, in 1976, was entitled *No Reels*, emphasizing their desire to bring the tempo of English music back to the relatively relaxed pace of the late-nineteenth-century

schottisches and polkas, rather than the heady tempo of imported American breakdowns and Irish reels.

### Revival concertina playing styles and techniques

The revival of morris teams as well as the renewed enthusiasm for English country music caused a large growth in interest at that time for the Anglo concertina. Few resources were available for these budding players, even those now considered the trendsetters. By this time, Kimber and Tester—by any measure the most widely known and respected of the old players—were both dead, and their recordings not widely available. At this time in Ireland, Australia, and South Africa, there were still living links to the past heyday of the Anglo, but in England, new players were left to their own devices in interpreting what the revived Anglo concertina music should sound like.

What was available to new owners of Anglo concertinas in England was the music of English melodeon players, not only those in revival morris sides but, perhaps more importantly, from older players of English country music. These included players like Bob Cann of Dartmoor, and Oscar Woods of Suffolk, who had a great impact on the young “orphan” Anglo players. John Kirkpatrick described the development of his style as follows in a 1973 *Free Reed* magazine “how to” article for Anglo players:

*My own views on how to play chords have been largely determined by the fact that I came to the Anglo from the melodeon, and was already conditioned to playing the tune on my right hand and chords on the left. After playing the Anglo for some time I still think this is the most logical way of doing it and it comes most easily to me, so this is the way I suggest you set about chords, at least to start with. For dance music you need a strong rhythmic vamp, and again influenced by the melodeon, I think a low bass note followed by a high chord sounds best, to give an um-pa effect.<sup>246</sup>*

Kirkpatrick was not alone in this adoption of melodeon-like accompaniment. According to Roger Digby:

*I think the origin of what has become—wrongly and unhelpfully—known as the English Style of Anglo playing (i.e., chords on the left, tune on the right—which isn't a “style,” it's a “technique”) originates in an attempt to follow the melodeon . . . . In the dearth of old concertina players in the '70s resurgence either in live or recorded form and, in the presence of a large number of excellent melodeon players, Oscar Woods, Bob Cann, et al., this is not at all surprising. It's certainly where my approach came from as I taught myself in a complete vacuum of other Anglo players.<sup>247</sup>*

This technique, with its complex left-hand chording with alternating bass notes and chords, may be unique to the concertina revival in England, as there are no recorded examples like it of old-time players in England, Ireland, or Australia, including those of William Kimber, whose chords were much simpler partial chords, octave-based, and for the most part oom-pah free.<sup>248</sup> There is precedence for it, however, in Carlo Minasi's tutor of 1846 for the German concertina (see the oom-pah left hand accompaniment in the waltz included as Figure 16 of Chapter 1), but it would seem that the revival players of the 1970s were not consulting that long-buried guide. As Kirkpatrick and Digby both mentioned, they were flying solo.

However conceived, the attractive and bouncy sound of this “new” style caught on with revival concertina players and is now the dominant style played in England among players of morris and English country traditional music on the Anglo. Other revival players who seem to play often or mostly in this style include Alan Day, Andy Turner, Roger Edwards and Brian Peters in the UK, and Tom and Jody Kruskal and British expat John Roberts in the United States. Many of these players have shifted from the old C/G and Bb/F Anglos dominant in the past to Anglos keyed in G/D—never previously a popular tuning—in order to chord more easily

when playing with other musicians in popular keys—especially melodeon players.

This “new” way of playing the Anglo is not particularly simple, as it requires separation of actions on the right and the left, and it is often not intuitive, but it makes for excellent listening and dancing. Along with an even more popular highly ornamented revival Anglo concertina style in Ireland (see Chapter 3), this style proclaims the unique ability of the Anglo concertina to remake itself in modern times, yet stay true to its traditional roots.

A few other revival players of note include:

Peter Bellamy (1944-1991), a Norfolk artist and singer, became a founding member of the vocal group *The Young Tradition*, who sang English traditional songs in the late 1960s. He began to use the Anglo concertina in his solo work in approximately 1968. By the 1970s, he was recording the ballads of Rudyard Kipling, and later he wrote a ballad-opera, *The Transports*. Self-taught on the concertina, Bellamy used it to accompany his singing in a unique style. Typically he used drones, inserting partial chords to accent phrases in the song.

Andrew Blakeney-Edwards (1966-1985) started to play in 1973 at the age of seven, and Roger Digby was an early instructor. Like Fred Kilroy, he played an expanded keyboard Anglo, in his case a 39-button as well as a 51-button Jeffries (Figure 121). Like Kilroy and many Boer South African players, he had a penchant for chromatic tunes, and played several Scott Joplin rags. He and Kilroy were at the more technically advanced and modernist edge of English Anglo playing but, unfortunately, he was killed in an automobile accident at an early age.

Alan Day, of Horley, Surrey, came to traditional music during the revival in the early 1970s, at first by joining the revival Broadwood Morris Men. He plays the Anglo in a highly chorded style. Day and Folksound Records’ Graham Bradshaw collaborated on a 2005 survey CD of international styles on the Anglo, *Anglo International*, and Day has prepared an online



Figure 121. The late Anglo virtuoso Andrew Blakeney-Edwards. With thanks to Roger Digby.



Figure 122. Sussex player Will Duke. With thanks to Katie Howson and the East Anglia Traditional Music Trust.

tutor for his chorded style (see Resources, below).

Will Duke (Figure 122), a Sussex Anglo player who fell under the influence of Scan Tester, began playing in 1971. Of the recorded revival players, his style seems closest to that of the old octave players like Scan Tester and Australian player Dooley Chapman.

Brian Peters, a professional player from northern England, abandoned a career in biological sciences for the British and international folk music circuit. He plays both melodeon and Anglo concertina. Like many other revivalist players, he plays the Anglo in a richly chorded style. He occasionally teaches concertina and melodeon workshops.

Harry Scurfield, from Otley, West Yorkshire, is another revival player with a modernist bent, playing blues, jazz, Cajun, and even South African (Zulu) squashbox (Figure 123). With no Anglo players in most of those styles to learn from—squashbox excepted—Scurfield's style is unique. He plays in a five-piece group, *Bayou Gumbo*, and at times with another Anglo player, Matt Dennis. Scurfield often plays for dances using an octave style.



Figure 123. Harry Scurfield, in a recent concert with *Bayou Gumbo*. Photo by Ani McNeice.

Andy Turner became entranced with traditional music in the late 1970s, during the folk revival. A chorded-style revival player, he plays (and records) with the Oxfordshire group *Maggie Lane* and the dance band *Geckoes*. He is also active in West Gallery singing.

It is perhaps instructive to compare the current situation of concertina players in England to that of the Boers of South Africa (Chapter 5). As we have seen, revival-era Anglo concertina players in England tend to favor traditional

morris and English country music, using inventive playing techniques largely devised during the revival. Only a few modernist players have stepped well beyond nineteenth-century traditional music into twentieth-century musical genres—Kilroy, Blakeney-Edwards, and Scurfield among them. These modernist players are few indeed, although many of the players mentioned above have the odd popular, jazz, or ragtime tune in their repertoire. Among the Boers of South Africa, where Anglo playing has a higher profile than in England, Anglo playing has begun to divide itself into two camps: the traditionalists, who prefer to stick to diatonic nineteenth- and earliest-twentieth-century Boer ballroom dance tunes played on two-row *boerekonsertinas*, and modernists, who play in modern, often highly chromatic styles using extended-keyboard Anglos, typically of forty-two keys. In contrast to England, the modernists appear to be the most numerous of the two Boer camps.

Although many parallels exist between the two countries in their concertina music, a predominant difference has been the robust survival of Anglo playing amongst the Boers into the middle of the twentieth century. There were dozens of Boer dance bands in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, most of which had the concertina as the lead instrument, and these groups incorporated modern musical fashions—if not always modern dances—into their repertoire until the dawn of the rock 'n' roll world. It may well be that simple critical mass has made the difference; had there been more players in England in the era between the two World Wars, it is quite possible that more modernists like Fred Kilroy might have emerged. Instead, the Anglo concertina in England died and was reborn—largely as a nineteenth century “folk” instrument.

Whether the highly inventive, chorded style of the folk revival years in England will continue to attract new generations of Anglo players remains to be seen. Many have noted that the followers of the morris revival are aging, as are many devotees of the English country music “surge” of the 1970s-1980s. Attendance at traditional music workshops that feature Anglo

concertina instruction and sessions—the Bradfield weekend, Whitby, Whitney, and other such venues—although well attended, nonetheless are lacking in the children and young people that one notes in Irish concertina workshops and in Boer South African schools (see Chapters 3 and 5). As Roger Digby of *Flowers and Frolics* noted in 2001:

*The reawakened enthusiasm for English Country Music eventually slipped away as bands called it a day. Traditional music was never more than a small part of people's lives and those lives eventually reclaimed many of this second generation of enthusiasts. In many cases they now found that they could settle into the less frantic, social music sessions, in house parties and public bars, from which the music had originated. In a way they returned to the context that had given them their origin. I know that one of my great pleasures is to meet a few old friends for a few tunes over a few beers, but I don't do it very often. Such was, I suspect, the pattern for many a country musician.*

*English Country Music continues in the pubs and kitchens where it had its origins and occasionally in the broader, more commercial, venues. Many of us who now play it are not traditional musicians, although we respect the tradition that we emulate and will not debase it. The tradition, in the pure sense, is not as strong as it was either in music or song. . . . Yet the music continues.*<sup>249</sup>

### **A rebirth of concertina building in England**

Three English firms that provided quality new instruments during the revival years have added a significant boost to the revival of concertina playing not only in England but in the rest of the world. By the time the late twentieth century revival in English traditional music began in earnest, only one builder of quality concertinas remained in England—and for that matter, the world. H. Crabb and Son (Figure 124), a family firm in North London, had its beginnings in the earliest years of concertina building, when John and Charles Crabb worked for Wheatstone in the

1830s (see Chapter 1). By the period 1889-1895, during the Anglo's heyday, the Crabb firm was building some thirty Anglo concertinas a week, at a price of £3.50 each. The decline in the middle of the twentieth century, however, was hard on that firm. Neville Crabb later said: "In 1960 we had no work and no money. In that year we filled in time making twelve miniatures; they took ten years to sell!"<sup>250</sup> The firm survived on repair work, and by the 1970s, thanks to the folk music revival, orders for new concertinas began to come in to their shop on Liverpool Road. In 1973 the firm increased its staff, and by 1978 there was a three-year waiting list for their products. After the death of Harry and Neville Crabb and the departure of Geoff Crabb for other work, however, the company shut its doors in the 1980s. In recent years, a retired Geoff Crabb has built a few more Anglo concertinas, carrying on a nearly 180-year-old family craft.



Figure 124. Harry Crabb (center) with sons Neville (left) and Geoff (right) in front of their Islington shop, 1978. Photograph by Bob Naylor, from Roger Digby's history of the Crabb firm on [www.concertina.net](http://www.concertina.net).

A second firm began as a complete start-up during the concertina revival. Colin Dipper (b. 1948) and his brother Andrew bought the first of many concertinas in 1959, and taught themselves to repair them. By 1967, the two were working professionally, repairing both free-reed and

stringed instruments for antique musical instrument specialist Tony Bingham in London. By 1968, the Dipper brothers started making concertina parts, and published their first concertina parts pricelist. During the same period, Colin had a day job as an industrial designer, but in 1971 he and his wife, Rosalie Dipper (Figures 125 and 126), left London to set up a workshop in a seventeenth-century cottage in Heytesbury, Wiltshire. They started building concertinas in 1973, and by 1984 they had built over one hundred.<sup>251</sup> The Dippers are still at it today and have crafted hundreds of the finest concertinas in the world. Their son John Dipper (pictured playing at his father's tuning bench as a boy in about 1985, in Figure 127) has recently joined the family firm, now known as *C & R Dipper & Son*.

The Dippers' strategy has been to work in a traditional hand-crafted manner, a strategy to which they have resolutely adhered. An interviewer asked Colin Dipper in 1984 whether he should take apprentices and increase production, to which Dipper replied:

*It would be nice, but the way that some small industries work in England, you have to work at the lower end of the income scale, otherwise it's made impossible for you. There are all sorts of tax disincentives for increasing the size of your business unless you start mass production—and I don't really see the future of concertinas in mass production. In the end, Wheatstone, Lachenal, and even Jeffries were putting out too many instruments for the amount of hand work they had available to finish them properly—the late Wheatstone instruments were not very good, and Lachenal just spread themselves out too much on the theory of making hundreds of instruments that weren't really very good.<sup>252</sup>*

It is the high-end, hand-crafted traditional concertina that seems most in demand today, particularly because of the high technical demands imposed by the highly ornamented



Figure 125. Colin Dipper, Heytesbury, Wiltshire concertina maker, in his attic workshop. He and his wife Rosalie Dipper began building concertinas in 1973. With thanks to John Dipper.



Figure 126. Rosalie Dipper working on a set of bellows in their workshop. With thanks to John Dipper.



Figure 127. John Dipper as a child, at his father's tuning bench, ca. 1985. Now fully grown, he has joined the firm, and new instruments are marked *C&R Dipper & Son*.

techniques of modern Irish players as well as by the increasing use of chords by many English players. Traditional craftsmen like the Dippers have never been able to completely keep up with demand, and waiting lists stretch for years.

The striking lapse in quality of middle-twentieth-century Wheatstone instruments mentioned by Colin Dipper in the above quote is well known. The Wheatstone firm's history has been summarized in detail by Neil Wayne,<sup>253</sup> who noted that during the general decline in sales of musical instruments in the early twentieth century, the firm was bought by Besson and Company, later to become a subsidiary of Boosey and Hawkes. Production ceased during the Second World War, and when post-war production was resumed, they tried to cash in on the folk music boom of the late 1950s by building the Mayfair concertina, a cheap affair with accordion reeds and aluminum endplates. The effort was a failure, and concertina production at the firm ceased in the mid-1970s. Fortunately at this time, Steve Dickinson of Stowmarket, Suffolk heard of the closing. He purchased the company's name and retrieved many of the firm's production machines from a dumpster at Boosey and Hawkes, in the nick of time. He began production of his own concertinas in 1975, and his instruments have a reputation, along with those of the Dippers, of being the finest available, although they are produced in small numbers (Figure 128).

As the global traditional music revival has continued, the demand for fine instruments has continued to grow. A huge gap in quality and playability exists between inexpensive, mass-produced German, Italian, and Chinese instruments and the hand-made concertinas of firms like Dipper, Dickinson, and others. By the early 1990s, several new firms explored a potential middle ground, when they began to build "hybrid" concertinas, coupling quality actions, bellows and casework with machine-made, hand-tuned accordion reeds. These have been generally well accepted as intermediate quality instruments, with prices perhaps only a third to half of that of top-end concertinas, and much shorter waiting periods for buyers. In

England, those firms include A.C. Norman & Company as well as Hobgoblin music; Marcus Music makes similar instruments in Wales. The market continues to evolve as the traditional music revival continues to grow. Contact details for all of the firms mentioned above, along with those of their global counterparts, are to be found in the Resources section of Chapter 1.

During the concertina's revival, knowledge of the instrument and its history have grown enormously, thanks in large part to the efforts of numerous amateur historians and, in particular, the efforts of two collectors. Neil Wayne, mentioned above (Figure 117), amassed a large collection of concertinas that was ultimately acquired by the Horniman Museum of London. A second British free-reed collector, Stephen Chambers, now living in Kilkee Ireland, has put together an extensive collection of all types of early free-reed instruments, including all types of concertinas. A small part of his collection is shown in Figure 129. Both of these experts have contributed much to the renewal of interest in the instrument, as has used instrument dealer Chris Algar in Stoke-on-Trent.



Figure 128. A 30-button Wheatstone G/D Anglo concertina built by Steve Dickinson. From the author's collection.



Figure 129. Free reed expert and collector Stephen Chambers, who operates a musical instrument shop in Kilrush, County Clare. This photo was taken at a music school there in 2005. Photo by Shay Fogarty.



## Resources

### Selected recordings of English traditional music on the Anglo-German concertina

William Kimber: *Absolutely Classic, The Anglo Concertina Music of William Kimber* (CD), English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS). <http://www.efdss.org>

Scan Tester: *I Never Played to Many Posh Dances* (CD), Veteran VTS03/04, UK. <http://www.veteran.co.uk>.

*Anglo International* (CD), Folksound Records. This CD provides a wide survey of recordings of both survivors of the Anglo's heyday in England (Scan Tester, Fred Kilroy) as well as noted revival players Roger Digby, Andrew Blakeney-Edwards, Harry Scurfield, John Watcham, Andy Turner, Will Duke, John Kirkpatrick, Roger Edwards, and Alan Day. It is the best single resource for hearing a varied sample of today's English players, with a variety of other players from Ireland, America and South Africa. Available at Folksound Records: <http://www.folksound.co.uk>

Recordings of many other English traditional groups, some with concertina, may be found at:

Free Reed Records: <http://www.free-reed.co.uk>  
Topic Records: <http://www.topicrecords.co.uk>  
Veteran Records: <http://www.veteran.co.uk>.  
English Folk Dance and Song Society:  
<http://www.efdss.org>

### Tutors for the Anglo-German concertina in English styles

Alan Day, *Concertina Tutor*. This tutor, available gratis online, describes the chorded style and has accompanying music files.  
<http://www.etanbenami.com/Anglo%20Concertina%20Tutor/>

Roger Digby, *Faking It: A guide to selecting appropriate chords on the Anglo and Duet Concertinas* (with recorded music files). The Concertina Library, <http://www.concertina.com>

John Kirkpatrick, *How to Play the Anglo, Parts I-III*. <http://www.johnkirkpatrick.co.uk/writings.htm>

Dan Worrall, *The Anglo Concertina Music of William Kimber*, English Folk Dance and Song Society, London. <http://www.efdss.org>

### Concertina and related traditional music organizations

The International Concertina Association: The oldest concertina organization on the planet, and publishers of *Papers of the International Concertina Association*, a journal for concertina history. <http://www.concertina.org>

English Folk Dance and Song Society: The organization of Cecil Sharp and William Kimber has a superb library of traditional music and dance at their headquarters in North London. <http://www.efdss.org>

West Country Concertina Players:  
<http://www.wccp.co.uk>

East Anglian Traditional Music Trust:  
<http://www.eatmt.org.uk>

Chiltern Concertina Group:  
<http://www.chiltinas.org.uk>

Lewes Saturday Folk Club, East Sussex:  
<http://www.escis.org.uk>

Royal Concertinas: monthly sessions at The Royal Hotel, Dungworth, Sheffield, South Yorkshire.

Bradfield Traditional Music Weekend, August each year in Yorkshire; concertina and other traditional music.

### Concertina information

See Chapter 1 for lists of builders and vendors in England. Other information sources of note include:

Concertina FAQ: These questions and answers provide general information on all aspects of the concertina. <http://www.concertina.info>

Repair: *The Concertina Maintenance Manual*, Mally Publications (2003): This superb guide is by David Elliott, <http://www.mally.com>

The Concertina Library: This collection contains articles describing various aspects of the history of the

concertina in England by several notable experts, including Chris Algar, Allan Atlas, Stephen Chambers, Stuart Eydmann, Robert Gaskins, Randall Merris, Neil Wayne, and Wes Williams, as well as several informative tutors form the Anglo's heyday in England. It is available for free download at <http://www.concertina.com>.

Concertina.net Discussion Forum: This concertina discussion group has a large following of players from England and is a good place to learn about technique and history. <http://www.concertina.net>

The Horniman Museum, London, houses the Neil Wayne concertina collection, which consists of hundreds of vintage concertinas collected by Wayne, as well as related printed materials from the instrument's golden age. Most materials can only be viewed by appointment. Online catalog with photographs is at <http://www.horniman.ac.uk>.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Note: this Chapter focuses on England, rather than Great Britain, for several reasons. The Anglo-German concertina was both invented in England and saw its greatest concentration of use there. Although Scotland and Wales also experienced robust usage of German and Anglo-German concertinas—Stuart Eydmann has reported at some length about concertina usage in Scotland—documentation of that usage, especially in terms of digitally accessible archives, is less well developed. Northern Ireland will be considered in the section on Ireland (Chapter 3). Beyond obvious musical and other cultural ties—and differences—between the North and the Irish Republic, Ireland was governed as a unit in Victorian times, during the bulk of the heyday of the Anglo-German concertina.

<sup>2</sup> John Langton and Robert John Morris, *Atlas of Industrializing Britain, 1780-1914* (London and New York: Routledge, 1986), p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> John Savile, *Rural Depopulation in England and Wales, 1851-1951* (London: Routledge, 1957), p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Dudley Baines, 1985, *Migration in a Mature Economy: Emigration and Internal Migration in England and Wales 1861-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 267.

<sup>5</sup> John Savile, *Rural Depopulation in England and Wales*, p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> John Langton and Robert John Morris, *Atlas of Industrializing Britain*, pp. 26-28. The relative proportion of Irish and Scottish immigrants was higher in immediately preceding decades.

<sup>7</sup> John Langton and Robert John Morris, *Atlas of Industrializing Britain*, pp. 30-35.

<sup>8</sup> Jerry White, *London in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* (London: Vintage Books, 2007), p. 202.

<sup>9</sup> John E. Zucchi, *Little Slaves of the Harp* (Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> "The Music in Our Street: a Word from a Girl who Lives in It," *Punch or the London Charivari*, 102 (1892): p. 57.

<sup>11</sup> "Wooing Under Difficulty," in George Staunton Brodie, *Vagrant Verses, and a Play* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1876), pp. 102-103.

<sup>12</sup> "London's Many Noises," from the *Boston Herald*, in *The Sanitarian*, A Monthly Magazine, 39 (Brooklyn, NY: 1897): p. 47-48.

<sup>13</sup> "Itinerant Music, Abroad and at Home," in Professor Ella, *Musical Sketches, Abroad and at Home* (London: William Reeves, 1878), p. 152.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Dickens, "Music and Misery," in *All the Year Round*, a Weekly Journal 20 (London, 1868): p. 232.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Dickens, "Music and Misery," (1868).

<sup>16</sup> Henry Mayhew, "Street Vocalists: Statement of another Ethiopian Serenader," in *London Labour and the London Poor*, 3 (London, 1856).

<sup>17</sup> Charles Babbage, *Passages from the Life of a Philosopher* (London: Longman, Roberts and Green, 1864), p. 359.

<sup>18</sup> See Allan Atlas, "George Shaw on the Concertina," *Papers of the International Concertina Association*, 4 (2007): p. 51.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Grant White, *England Without and Within* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, 1881), pp. 548-550.

<sup>20</sup> Henry Mayhew, in *London Labour and the London Poor*, 3 (London, 1856).

<sup>21</sup> Henry Mayhew, "Bohemian London" *St. James's Magazine*, no. 6 (London: October 1870): p. 114.

<sup>22</sup> Police column, *The Times*, October 7, 1868.

<sup>23</sup> "Music Under the Earth" *Orchestra* 13 (London, December 1869), p. 181.

<sup>24</sup> "London Rambles, Third Class," *Plymouth and Cornish Advertiser*, issue 6075, (Exeter), April 16, 1884.

<sup>25</sup> "Terminus London" in George Robert Sims, ed., *Living London* (London: Cassel and Company, 1902), p. 95.

<sup>26</sup> Police column, *The Times*, (London), June 11, 1900, p. 15.

<sup>27</sup> "Musician or Beggar?" *The Times*, (London), Jan. 28, 1922.

<sup>28</sup> "Woes of street musicians: Professors on the concertina," *The Illustrated Police News*, issue 1753 (London), September 18, 1897.

<sup>29</sup> The Concertina Library: [www.concertina.com](http://www.concertina.com)

<sup>30</sup> See Randall Merris and Robert Gaskins, "Calculate Modern Values of Historic Concertina Prices," (2005), The Concertina Library, <http://www.concertina.com/calculator/index.htm>

<sup>31</sup> "Echoes of the Month," *The Musical Herald* (London), April 1, 1912, p. 113.

<sup>32</sup> J. Cuthbert Hadden, "Passing Notes," *The Nonconformist Musical Journal* 18, no. 8 (London, 1905): p. 53.

<sup>33</sup> Rev. Richard Hibbs, *Prussia and the Poor, or Observations upon the Systematized Relief of the Poor at Eberfeld, in Contrast to That of England* (London and Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1876), p. xi-xii.

<sup>34</sup> "Composer's Sad Plight," *Irish Independent*, September 18, 1907.

<sup>35</sup> "Excerpta Varia, Blind Singers," *The Orchestra* No. 426 (London, 1871).

<sup>36</sup> "The Story of Liza Begg," *The Cornhill Magazine* 23 (London), July to December 1894: p. 61.

<sup>37</sup> "On the Fringe of Society: A Couple of Characters," *The Leeds Mercury*, issue 18306, (Leeds), December 5, 1896.

<sup>38</sup> W.H. Wilkins, *The Alien Invasion, Social Questions of Today* (London: Methuen and Co., 1892), pp. 58-59.

<sup>39</sup> W.M. Brewer, biography of Joe Morley, in *The Banjo in Britain*, (Lewisham BMG Club), December 1955.

<sup>40</sup> This little story was widely reported at the time. This version comes from the *Farmer's Cabinet* (US), Sept. 20 1861, but can also be found in *Freedom's Champion*, (Atchison KS, USA), Sept. 28 1861.

<sup>41</sup> Jerry White, *London in the Nineteenth Century*, 2007, pp. 108-109.

<sup>42</sup> Walter Besant, *East London*, (New York: The Century Co., 1901), p. 298.

<sup>43</sup> Walter Besant, *East London*, (1901), p. 296. In later years, music (or at least busking) was frowned upon at Hampstead Heath. According to Roger Digby (personal communication to the author, 2009), Harry Crabb and his friend, Fred, would go there to busk, but would have to dodge the gatekeepers.

<sup>44</sup> "Crystal Palace," *The Times*, (London), May 21, 1872, p. 8.

<sup>45</sup> Charles G. Harper, *The Hastings Road, and the "Happy Springs of Tumblebridge"* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1906), pp. 58-60.

<sup>46</sup> "The Journeyman Engineer," *The Great Unwashed* (London, Tinsley Brothers, 1868), pp. 240-241.

<sup>47</sup> Charles G. Harper, *The Dover Road: Annals of an Ancient Turnpike* (London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1895), p. 111.

<sup>48</sup> Lilian Whiting, *The Lure of London* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1914), pp. 218-220.

<sup>49</sup> Richard Harding Davis, *Our English Cousins* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1890), p. 28.

<sup>50</sup> "London Noise and London Sleep," letter to the editor, *The Times*, (London), August 13, 1869, p. 8.

<sup>51</sup> "Unnecessary Street Noises," letter to the editor, *The Times*, (London), November 15, 1890, p. 16.

<sup>52</sup> "The Concertina: This Instrument of Torture Adopted as a London Society Fad" *The Daily Picayune*, (New Orleans), May 11 1894, p. 2.

<sup>53</sup> A "coster" is a fruit or vegetable vendor; the meaning of the phrase "jumping on his mother" is unclear but appears to refer to assault of bullying; this same phrase appears in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Pirates of Penzance*, where it also refers to a rough coster.

<sup>54</sup> "London's Many Noises" article from the *Boston Herald*, reprinted in *The Sanitarian* 39 (Brooklyn, 1897): p. 45.

<sup>55</sup> "Very Funny to Look At," *Otago Witness* (New Zealand), November 26, 1891, p. 45.

<sup>56</sup> Robert Machray, *The Night Side of London* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1902), p. 281.

<sup>57</sup> Scan Tester, as quoted in Reg Hall, "I Never Played To Many Posh Dances"; Scan Tester, *Sussex Musician* (Rochford Essex: Musical Traditions, supplement no. 2, 1990), pp. 20-21.

<sup>58</sup> Robert Machray, op.cit. (1902), pp. 291-294.

<sup>59</sup> *The Journal of Nicholas Cresswell, 1774-1777* (New York: The Dial Press, 1924), p. 30.

<sup>60</sup> *The Journal of Nicholas Cresswell*, p. 52.

<sup>61</sup> Joyce Cauthen, With *Fiddle and Well-Rosined Bow: Old-Time Fiddling in Alabama* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989), p. 4. Also see Kevin Donleavy, *Strings of Life: Conversations with Old-Time Musicians from Virginia and North Carolina* (Blacksburg Virginia: Pocahontas Press, 2004), pp. 5-6.

<sup>62</sup> Alan Jabbour, "Cultural threads in Henry Reed's fiddling style," *The Henry Reed Collection*, American Memory, Library of Congress.

<sup>63</sup> See, for example, the entry in *Wikipedia* for St. James's Hall; that and its entries for the Ethiopian Serenaders were key sources for this paragraph.

<sup>64</sup> Both sets of quotes are from Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (London: Griffin, Bohn and Company, 1861), p. 190-192.

<sup>65</sup> Charles Dickens, "A Black Affair" in *All the Year Round*, (London), December 3, 1864, p. 394.

<sup>66</sup> J. Drew Gay, *From Pall Mall to the Punjab, or With the Prince in India* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1876), p. 282.

<sup>67</sup> Anonymous, "Thoughts Dedicated to a House Band Some Time Ago," *The Harrovian* 1 (1870), p. 144.

<sup>68</sup> David R. Locke, *Nasby in Exile, or Six Months of Travel* (Toledo and Boston: Locke Publishing Company, 1882), p. 65.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>70</sup> "Theatre" *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, Issue 7415 (Oxford), May 4, 1895.

<sup>71</sup> "The Sands of Margate: A Glimpse of the Crowds at London's Coney Island," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, (New York), August 6, 1897, p. 3.

<sup>72</sup> Jerry White, *London in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, (2007), pp. 287-288.

<sup>73</sup> Jerry White, *London in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, (2007), p. 280.

<sup>74</sup> F. Anstey, "London Music Halls," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, (New York), January 1891.

<sup>75</sup> Randall Merris, "Dutch Daly: Comedy and Concertinas on the Variety Stage," in *Papers of the International Concertina Association* 4, (2007), p. 1-26. See Appendix II for listings of Variety concertinists of the late Victorian era.

<sup>76</sup> T. Allston Brown, *A History of the New York Stage* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1901), p. 328.

<sup>77</sup> Henry C. Lunn, "A Comic Concert" *The Musical Times*, (London), August 1, 1869.

<sup>78</sup> "Amusements in Brighton," *The Era*, (London), November 7, 1891.

<sup>79</sup> "Wulff's Continental Circus," *The Times*, (London), December 27, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>80</sup> *Hull Daily News*, August 22 1911.

<sup>81</sup> Randall Merris, "Dutch Daly," (2007).

<sup>82</sup> Peter Honri, *Working the Halls*, (Farnborough Hampshire: Saxon House, 1973). Also see Randall Merris, "Dutch Daly" (2007).

<sup>83</sup> "The London Theatres," *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, (Oxford), May 4, 1895.

<sup>84</sup> Henry Irving, "An Odd Attraction" in Arthur Goddard, *Players of the Period*, (1891), p.15.

<sup>85</sup> Roger Blazer, *David Jacob Blazer, 1886-1940*, <http://www.maxalding.co.uk>.

<sup>86</sup> "Concertina matters," *The Musical Herald*, (London), Nov. 1, 1898, p. 347.

<sup>87</sup> Jerry White, *London in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, (2007), p. 431-432. Also see discussion of Mann in Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 25.

<sup>88</sup> "History," on the Salvation Army International's website, <http://www.salvationarmy.org>.

<sup>89</sup> George Scott Railton, *Heathen England* (London: Partridge & Company 1879), p. 114. Abney Park is today the final resting place of Booth and some of his family. Now a North London wildlife haven, it was intended for generations and is in advanced dilapidation, except for the Booth tombs, just inside the South gate.

<sup>90</sup> *The War Cry*, Vol. 1, August 14, 1880.

<sup>91</sup> This tutor can be viewed and downloaded at <http://www.concertina.com/chambers/booth-salvation-army-concertina/booth-salvation-army-concertina-1888.pdf>.

<sup>92</sup> "Salvation Army Disturbances," *The Preston Guardian*, August 25, 1883.

<sup>93</sup> Edward Cox, *Magistrates Cases: Reports of All Cases Decided by the Superior Courts*, (London), 1886, p. 364.

<sup>94</sup> "Salvation Army Disturbances," *The Times*, (London), October 14, 1881, p. 6.

<sup>95</sup> G.F. Chambers, "The Salvation Army at Eastbourne" *The Times*, (London), September 14, 1891, p. 14.

<sup>96</sup> "Is the Concertina Noisy?" *Fun*, (London), 1889.

<sup>97</sup> "Salvation Army Wedding," *Pall Mall Gazette*, (England), as quoted in the *Brisbane Courier* (Australia), March 6, 1884.

<sup>98</sup> John Curwen, "The Music of the Salvation Army," in *Studies in Worship Music*, (London: J. Curwen and Sons), pp. 28-29.

<sup>99</sup> Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London* (London: MacMillan and Company, Ltd. 1902), p. 3.

<sup>100</sup> "Retrospection," *Punch*, 1883.

<sup>101</sup> Personal communication to the author, Cpt. Alex Cadogan, Salvation Army, Chesterfield UK, May 28, 2008.

<sup>102</sup> George Jones, *Recollections of the English Concertina*, from 1844: The Concertina Library, <http://www.concertina.com>. George Jones was born February 29, 1832.

<sup>103</sup> Roger Digby remembers singing with Erik Ilott in the Bristol Citadel in 1972, after the band had dispersed. Of that visit, he recalled that "Erik had his Anglo with him and they showed us two large cupboards with shelves of concertinas! I didn't know enough to know the makes, but I remember they all looked very battered." Personal communication to the author, 2009.

<sup>104</sup> With thanks to Malcom Clapp, Australia for his information about and photographs of these old Salvation Army bands, posted on the Forum of <http://www.concertina.net>.

<sup>105</sup> Arnold Bennett, *Paris Nights and Other Impressions of Places and People* (New York: George Doran Company, 1908), p. 188.

<sup>106</sup> "The Anglo German Concertina," in *The Field Officer*, (Salvation Army, 1911), p. 349. I thank Susan Mitchem of the Salvation Army's National Archives, Alexandria Virginia, for finding this piece for me.

<sup>107</sup> Photographs of the Ashton under Lyne band at several stages over the period ca. 1890-1924 can be seen at <http://www.tameside.gov.uk/history/archive.php3>. I thank Alan Day for making me aware of these photographs.

<sup>108</sup> Peter Graham, *The Rural Exodus, The Problem of the Village and the Town* (London: Methuen and Co., 1892), pp. 1-29.

<sup>109</sup> Augustus Jessopp, *Arcady, For Better or Worse: A Study of Life in Rural England* (London: Fisher Irwin, 1887), pp. 230-231.

<sup>110</sup> By "Our Special Commissioner," "Musical Life in Norfolk" the *Musical Herald* (London), October 1890, p. 508-510.

<sup>111</sup> Curwen, J. Spencer, "The progress of popular music," in *The Contemporary Review* LII, (July-December 1887): p. 242.

<sup>112</sup> See discussion in Dan Worrall, "The Beginnings of Concertina Playing in Ireland, 1834-1930" (2008): The Concertina Library, <http://www.concertina.com> and at <http://www.angloconcertina.org>.

<sup>113</sup> "Notes from London," *Irish Times*, August 30, 1890.

<sup>114</sup> Edwin Waugh, *Home Life of the Lancashire Factory Folk During the Cotton Famine* (Manchester: Simpkin, Marshall and Co., 1867), p. 187.

<sup>115</sup> "The Music of a Village," in *The Musical World*, (London), April 4, 1885, pp. 221-222.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222.

<sup>117</sup> R.B. Ince, "Our Musical Idiots" *The Sackbut*, 4, (January 1924): pp. 174-175.

<sup>118</sup> "Piping Peabworth," *The English Illustrated Magazine*, (London: MacMillan and Co., 1884-1885), p. 276.

<sup>119</sup> Reg Hall, *Posh Dances* (1990), pp. 16-17.

<sup>120</sup> Collins, F.J. "The Concertina in Cornwall, Around 1890" in *The Concertina Newsletter* 7 (August 1972): pp.9-10. This reference was found in Stuart Eydmann, *The Life and Times of the Concertina: the adoption and usage of a novel musical instrument with particular reference to Scotland*, (Ph.D. dissertation, The Open University, 1995): The Concertina Library, <http://www.concertina.com>.

<sup>121</sup> Septimus Wind, "Letters to Well-Known Characters: To C.L.Gruneisen," *The Musical World*, (July 27, 1867), p. 506.

<sup>122</sup> Augustus Jessopp, *Arcady, for Better for Worse* (1887), p. 230-231.

<sup>123</sup> S. Baring Gould, *Old Country Life* (London: Methuen and Co., 1890), p. 244.

<sup>124</sup> Augustus Jessopp, *Arcady, for Better for Worse* (1887), p. 231.

<sup>125</sup> "The Old Church Bands," *Antiquary* (London: Elliot Stock), volume 50, 1914, p. 267.

<sup>126</sup> Arthur Bonsey, *From Month to Month* (London), June 1897, p. 141.

<sup>127</sup> "Sunday in the North Sea," in *The Sunday at Home: A Family Magazine for Sabbath Reading* (The Religious Tract Society, 1895), p. 725.

<sup>128</sup> *The Christian Miscellany and Family Visitor*, Third Series, volume IV, (1895): p. 315.

<sup>129</sup> John Thomas, 1888 diary:  
<http://welshmormonhistory.org> (resources, view 2473).

<sup>130</sup> Fred E. Woods, "Seagoing Saints," *Ensign*, (September 2001).

<sup>131</sup> *Journal of John David McAllister*, v. 4, 15 (May 1862), LDS Church Archives, 6. As quoted in Fred E. Woods, "Seagoing Saints," (2001).

<sup>132</sup> Library of Congress, *MS Interview with Jinky Wells* (1943). As quoted in Keith Chandler, *Ribbons, Bells, and Squeaking Fiddles, The Social History of Morris Dancing in the English South Midlands* (London: Hisarlik Press, 1993), 244p.

<sup>133</sup> Keith Chandler, "Richard Treadwell of Cumnor, Berkshire," No. 12 in *Musicians in 19th century southern England* (2006): *Musical Traditions*, <http://www.mustrad.org.uk>.

<sup>134</sup> *Shropshire Notes and Queries*, I and II, (Shrewsbury, June 19 1885), p. 61.

<sup>135</sup> Keith Chandler, *Ribbons, Bells and Squeaking Fiddles: The Social History of Morris Dancing in the English South Midlands, 1660-1900*, (London: Hisarlik Press, 1993), p. 180.

<sup>136</sup> *Shropshire Notes and Queries*, (1885), p. 61.

<sup>137</sup> Keith Chandler, *Ribbons, Bells, and Squeaking Fiddles* (1993), p. 180.

<sup>138</sup> Philip Heath-Coleman, notes to CD, *Stephen Baldwin, Here's One You'll Like*, (Gloucestershire, UK: Stroud, 2005), *Musical Traditions*, MTCDD334.

<sup>139</sup> D. Burkett of Haddenham, Cambridgeshire, 1958, as paraphrased in Enid Porter, Cambridgeshire Customs and Folklore (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 97.

<sup>140</sup> Joseph Needham and Arthur L. Peck, "Molly Dancing in East Anglia," *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society*, 1, no. 2, (1933): pp. 79-85.

<sup>141</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 9th edition, (New York, 1888), s.v. "Morris-Dance."

<sup>142</sup> T.W. Chaundy, "William Kimber (1872-1961)," *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society* 9, no.3, (1962): p. 115-118.

<sup>143</sup> "English Song and Dance," *Irish Independent*, Jan. 15, 1909.

<sup>144</sup> "Morris Dances," *The Times*, (London), July 10, 1909.

<sup>145</sup> See the CD release of Kimber's recordings, entitled *Absolutely Classic: The Music of William Kimber*, English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS), (London, 1999), CD 03. Also see D.M. Worrall, "The Anglo Concertina Music of William Kimber,"

(London: English Folk Dance and Song Society, 2005).

<sup>146</sup> K. Chandler, *Ribbons, Bells, and Squeaking Fiddles* (1993), p. 17. Also see D.M. Worrall, "William Kimber," (2005).

<sup>147</sup> Alfred Burton, *Rush-bearing: an Account of the Old Custom of Strewing Rushes* (Manchester: Brook and Chrystal, 1891), p. 117.

<sup>148</sup> "Mossley morris men, a history" (2009): <http://www.mossleymorris.com>.

<sup>149</sup> Violet Alford, *Introduction to English folklore* ([city unknown]: Bell, 1952; Republished by Read Books, 2006), pp. 104-105.

<sup>150</sup> Alan Ward, ed., "Fred Kilroy, Lancashire concertina player" in *Traditional Music*, nos. 1 and 3 (1975 and 1976). Fred Kilroy's rich playing may be heard on the recently issued CD, *Anglo International* (Folksound Records, Coventry UK). Also see "History of Royston" by Michael Higgins:

<http://www.zen42299.zen.co.uk/index.htm>.

<sup>151</sup> Alan Ward, "Fred Kilroy," no.1, (1975), p. 15.

<sup>152</sup> Derek Schofield, "Concertina Caleb" in *English Dance and Song*, (London, 1970s).

<sup>153</sup> Mark Davies, personal communication to the author, (2009).

<sup>154</sup> Alan Ward, "Fred Kilroy," no. 1, (1975), p. 17.

<sup>155</sup> See, for example, the website of the North of England Morris Dancing Carnival Organisation, <http://www.nemdc.com>.

<sup>156</sup> "Glossup Morris," (newspaper article, newspaper unknown), November 2, 1955. I am indebted to Howie Mitchell for this photo and article.

<sup>157</sup> Dave Jones, *The Roots of Welsh Border Morris Dances of Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Shropshire*, Revised Ed., (Putley, 1995).

<sup>158</sup> Derek Schofield, "Concertina Caleb," (1970s).

<sup>159</sup> Rhett Krause, "Morris Dancing and America Prior to 1913," *American Morris Newsletter* 25, no.4. (2005).

<sup>160</sup> "Miner Dancers," British Pathe (1930); newsreel footage, viewable online at <http://www.britishpathe.com>.

<sup>161</sup> P. H. Ditchfield, *Old English Customs Extant at the Present Time* (London: George Redway, 1896), p. 13-14.

<sup>162</sup> James Burnley, *West Riding Sketches* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1875), pp. 29-30.

<sup>163</sup> Ronnie Wharton and Arthur Clark, "The Tommy Talker bands of West Riding," *Musical Traditions*, no.1 (1983), MT072.

<sup>164</sup> Edmund Bogg, *From Edendale to the Plains of York* (Leeds, Edmund Bogg, 1901), p. 234.

<sup>165</sup> Charlotte Burne, ed., *Shropshire Folk-Lore, A Sheaf of Gleanings* (London: Truebner and Co., 1883), p. 386.

<sup>166</sup> Derek Schofield, "Concertina Caleb," (1970s), p. 3.

<sup>167</sup> J. Edward Vaux, *Church Folk Lore* (London, Skeffington and Son, 1902), p.295.

<sup>168</sup> Fanny Hitchman, as quoted in Michael Pickering, *Village song & culture: A Study Based on the Blunt Collection of Song from Adderbury, North Oxfordshire* (Taylor & Francis, 1982), 187p.

<sup>169</sup> Collins, F.J. "The Concertina in Cornwall, Around 1890" in *The Concertina Newsletter* 7 (August 1972): pp.9-10. This reference was found in Stuart Eydmann, *Life and Times of the Concertina*, (1995).

<sup>170</sup> J. Arthur Gibbs, *A Cotswold Village, or Country Life and Pursuits in Gloucestershire* (London: John Murray, 1899), pp. 58-59.

<sup>171</sup> "Welsh New Year," in *Grand Valley Times*, (Utah), December 27, 1912.

<sup>172</sup> Percy Maylam, *The Hooded Horse, An East Kent Christmas Custom* (Canterbury, 1909).

<sup>173</sup> Arthur Flynn, *Irish Dance* (Louisiana: Appletree Press, 1998), p. 17.

<sup>174</sup> Reg Hall, *I Never Played to Many Posh Dances* (Musical Traditions, 1990), supplement no. 2, p. 78.

<sup>175</sup> Reg Hall, *I Never Played to Many Posh Dances*, p. 77.

<sup>176</sup> Helen Brennan, *The Story of Irish Dance*, (Robert Rinehart Publishers, 2002), p. 94.

<sup>177</sup> The information in this paragraph is taken from a useful summary by the Canberra, Australia "Earthly Delights" Historic Dance Academy: <http://www.earthlydelights.com.au>.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>179</sup> Henry Mayhew, *London Labour*, (1861), p. 185. An earlier edition of 1856 contained a partial interview with the same boy, showing that the dance occurred in the mid 1850s.

<sup>180</sup> New Year's Eve in London Streets: *The Centennial Magazine*, 1889, vol. II, Wigg & Sons, Adelaide, p. 404.

<sup>181</sup> Henry Mayhew, "The London Street Folk," in *London Labour* (1861), p. 202.

<sup>182</sup> Charles James Longman, "The Lothian Hinds," in *Longman's Magazine* (Longmans Green and Co., 1883), p. 657.

<sup>183</sup> The Scottish Farm-Labourer, in *The Scottish Review*, XIV (1889), p. 232-233.

<sup>184</sup> W.C.B., in *Notes and Queries, A Medium of Intercommunication for Literary Men, General Readers, etc.*, 9<sup>th</sup> Series, VII (London), Feb 23 1901, p. 147.

<sup>185</sup> Scan Tester, as quoted in Reg Hall, *Posh Dances*, 1990, p. 77.

<sup>186</sup> Dr. R. Wortley, (1966), as quoted in Enid Porter, *Cambridgeshire Customs and Folklore* (1969), p. 145.

<sup>187</sup> Charles Dickens, "A Fancy Fair at Mopetown," in *All the Year Round, A Weekly Journal*, VII (1872), p. 155.

<sup>188</sup> Charles Lucas, (1930), "A Fenman's World," as quoted in Enid Porter, *Cambridgeshire Customs and Folklore* (1969), p. 140.

<sup>189</sup> P. Anderson Graham, *The Rural Exodus: The Problem of the Village and the Town* (London: Methuen & Co., 1892), p. 101.

<sup>190</sup> Louise Creighton, writing in a letter (1877) quoted in James T. Covert, *A Victorian Marriage*, (Continuum International Publishing Group, 2000), p. 115.

<sup>191</sup> Reg Hall, *Posh Dances*, (1990), p. 49.

<sup>192</sup> "The Cheapest Concertina" (advert.), *The Musical World*, June 1855, p. 367.

<sup>193</sup> Stuart Eydmann, *The Life and Times of the Concertina: the adoption and usage of a novel musical instrument with particular reference to Scotland*, (Ph.D. dissertation, The Open University, 1995): The Concertina Library, <http://www.concertina.com>.

<sup>194</sup> Clara Kathleen Rogers, *Memories of a Musical Career*: (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1919), p. 89-90.

<sup>195</sup> "Musical Notes," *The Graphic*, (London), December 25, 1884.

<sup>196</sup> "Concertina vs. Banjo, an Interview with Signor Alsepi," *Pall Mall Gazette*, (London), Feb. 2, 1889.

<sup>197</sup> John Preston Johnson, "A Plea for the Concertina," in *The Magazine of Music*, (London), May 1896, p. 342.

<sup>198</sup> T. L. Southgate, *English Music 1604-1904*, (London, 1906), p.339, as quoted by Stuart Eydmann, *Life and Times of the Concertina* (1995).

<sup>199</sup> Norman Fraser, "The Cult of the English Concertina, a Chat with Miss Christine Hawkes," *Cassell's Magazine*, (London), June-November 1908, pp. 159-161.

<sup>200</sup> "Touchstone," Notes, [Periodical unknown], (London), May 16, 1896.

<sup>201</sup> *The Idler, an Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, (1893), p. 74.

<sup>202</sup> "A Real Sculptor: Mr. Frank Dobson's Art," *The Times*, (London), November 8, 1921.

<sup>203</sup> R.B. Ince, "Our Musical Idiots," *The Sackbut*, 4, (1924), p. 174.

<sup>204</sup> Reg Hall, *Posh Dances*, (1990), p. 127.

<sup>205</sup> "Music Hath Charms," *Fun* 45, June 1887, p. 257.

<sup>206</sup> "The Anglo-German Concertina" *Punch* 99, July 19, 1890.

<sup>207</sup> The Minstrel Boy: taken from Funny Folks, and extracted in Warren Hamilton, ed., *Parodies of English and American Authors* (London, Reeves and Turner, 1886), pp. 250-251.

<sup>208</sup> "Musical Jottings," *North Wales Chronicle*, (Bangor), May 14, 1892.

<sup>209</sup> "Odd Notes," *Musical World* 47, no. 8, February 1869, p. 121.

<sup>210</sup> "England in Time of War," *The Times*, January 6, 1915, p. 4.

<sup>211</sup> "Pantomime at the Front," *The Times*, December 30, 1915, p. 7.

<sup>212</sup> "Letters from the Front, The R.A.M.C. in a School," *The Times*, January 28, 1915.

<sup>213</sup> "British Wounded from Germany" *The Irish Times*, October 8, 1915, p. 1.

<sup>214</sup> This account, originally published in the *London Daily News* of October 8, 1915, was contained in a later account: "Vile Conduct: Camp cruelties endured by English prisoners in Germany" *The Gleaner*, Kingston, Jamaica, November 10, 1915.

<sup>215</sup> "Letters from the Front," *The Times*, March 28, 1916, p. 7.

<sup>216</sup> Reg Hall, *Posh Dances*, (1990), p. 47.

<sup>217</sup> Philip Gibbs, *Now It Can Be Told*, (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1920), p. 77.

<sup>218</sup> "Hints for Tommie's Performers," *The Musical Herald*, March 1917, p. 79.

<sup>219</sup> "Evangeline Booth and Grace Hill," *The War Romance of the Salvation Army*, (Philadelphia and London: J.B. Lippincott and Company, 1919), p. 97.

<sup>220</sup> "Banjo and Concertina Band with Chorus," [Source unknown] from *Concertina & Squeezebox Magazine* 14, no. 15, (1987), p. 49.

<sup>221</sup> "The Armistice—London's Rejoicings—Pandemonium November 14," *The Advertiser*, (Adelaide Australia), January 1, 1919, p. 4.

<sup>222</sup> Robert Smythe Hichens, *Mrs. Morden* (New York: George Doran and Company, 1919), p. 90.

<sup>223</sup> "New Songs for Old," cartoon in *Votes for Women, Official Organ of the United Suffragettes*, January 15, 1915, p. 1.

<sup>224</sup> These notes are paraphrased from Derek Schofield, *Absolutely Classic, The Music of William Kimber* (London: English Folk Dance and Song Society, 1999), EFDSS CD 03.

<sup>225</sup> See transcriptions of his playing at Dan Worrall, *The Anglo Concertina Music of William Kimber*, (English Folk Dance and Song Society, 2005).

<sup>226</sup> These notes are paraphrased from Reg Hall, *Posh Dances* (1990).

<sup>227</sup> Reg Hall, *Posh Dances* (1990), p. 96.

<sup>228</sup> The photographs are from a family history site of Peter N. Jones of Holdingham near Sleaford, Lincolnshire: <http://megi42.tripod.com/lordofholdingham/index.html>.

<sup>229</sup> Reg Hall, *Posh Dances* (1990), p. 41.

<sup>230</sup> Fred Kilroy's biography is paraphrased from Alan Ward, ed., "Fred Kilroy, Lancashire concertina player," in *Traditional Music*, nos. 1 and 3 (1975 and 1976). Fred Kilroy's rich playing may be heard on the recently issued CD, *Anglo International* (Folksound Records, Coventry UK).

<sup>231</sup> *Anglo International* (Folksound Records, Coventry UK, 2005).

<sup>232</sup> Alan Ward, "Fred Kilroy," (1975), p. 15.

<sup>233</sup> This newsreel can be viewed at <http://www.britishpathe.com>. Search for the words "miners' sword dance."

<sup>234</sup> Tony Marshall, Ellis Marshall's grandson, kindly provided details of his grandfather's life, as well as tape recordings and a photograph.

<sup>235</sup> I am indebted to Wes Williams for providing these minutes from the International Concertina Association.

<sup>236</sup> "Veteran Artistes", at *Veteran*; <http://www.veteran.co.uk>.

<sup>237</sup> Derek Schofield, "Concertina Caleb," (1970s).

<sup>238</sup> Mark Davies, 2009, personal communication.

<sup>239</sup> Bill Gibbons, as quoted in "Bill Gibbons, Barge Dancer," *English Dance and Song* 42, no.1, (1980), p.11.

<sup>240</sup> David Savage, personal communication to the author (2008).

<sup>241</sup> Available at <http://www.britishpathe.com>. Search for "miner" and "concertina" to find the newsreel.

<sup>242</sup> For a further discussion of early styles, see Roger Digby, "Anglo File," *English Dance and Song* 64, no.2, (2002), p. 6-7. Available at <http://www.concertina.com>.

<sup>243</sup> *International Concertina Association Newsletter*, no. 148, November, 1967, p. 4.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 153, April, 1968, p. 5.

<sup>245</sup> Paul Schwartz, "Notes from Roger Digby" on *Flowers and Frolics* (2000): <http://www.concertina.net>.

<sup>246</sup> John Kirkpatrick, "How to Play the Anglo," Part III, *Free Reed Magazine* (1973), p. 21.

<sup>247</sup> Roger Digby, personal communication to the author, (2009).



<sup>248</sup> See discussion on pages 16-18 of Dan Worrall, *The Anglo Concertina Music of William Kimber*, (London: English Folk Dance and Song Society, 2005).

<sup>249</sup> Roger Digby, *English Country Music—A Personal View* (2001); <http://www.concertina.net>.

<sup>250</sup> This quote and all the material on Crabb's business in this paragraph is from a brief history of the firm by Roger Digby, entitled *H. Crabb and Son, concertina makers*: <http://www.concertina.net>.

<sup>251</sup> Colin and John Dipper, personal communication to the author, 2009.

<sup>252</sup> George Salley and John Townsend, "Colin Dipper, an Interview," *Concertina and Squeezebox Magazine* 2, no.4, (1984), pp. 14-21.

<sup>253</sup> Neil Wayne, "The Wheatstone Concertina" (1991), pp. 117-149.

## Chapter 3. The Concertina in Ireland

*The young lads long ago, they had no place to go. They had nothing only goin' in there and collectin' in a neighbour's house for a dance. The concertina, 'twas in every house and the boys were able to play it as well as the girls. T'ould concertina, shure! 'Twas easy to learn on it. In the neighbours' houses on the flag floor, they'd be dancin' wild with the nail boots and you'd hear them crackin' a fling before you'd come into the kitchen at all. 'Twas a nice way of putting down the time, but shure! 'tis all different now. Everywhere you'd go that time there was a concertina player. There was one nearly in every house.*

—Margaret Dooley (b. 1885) of Knockjames, East Clare, as interviewed in 1986<sup>1</sup>

### *Introduction and Historical Background*

#### **Legends and questions**

The Anglo-German concertina and its direct antecedent, the two-row German concertina, have long been popular in Irish traditional music circles. It has been said of County Clare in the early part of the twentieth century that “almost every house . . . had a concertina, usually kept in the chimney corner nook.”<sup>2</sup> This heyday of popularity, however, was followed by a steep decline that left relatively few players in Ireland by the 1960s, most of them located in County Clare. The past three decades have seen a great resurgence in its use, and much has been written about those surviving players and their histories.<sup>3</sup> Most of what we know about the instrument in Ireland comes from these living sources, and yet there are gaps. Oral history only reaches back as far as living memory, so such accounts do not extend with any real detail beyond perhaps eighty or more years. Although the nineteenth century experienced the instrument's formative period in Ireland, there is very little published information about Irish concertina playing at that time.

Most of the twentieth-century sources interviewed in published accounts have been from County Clare, leaving largely unrecorded the extent to which concertinas were played elsewhere in Ireland and raising a question as to why surviving players of the mid-twentieth century were so highly concentrated in that

county. Folklore in Clare holds that either seamen on ships that plied the Shannon Estuary, or the chandleries that supplied them, may have been responsible for the arrival of concertinas in Clare, with the implication that the twentieth-century concentration of concertinas there might have resulted, at least partly, from this seaborne link. For example, Michael Tubridy, in his biography of Mrs. Crotty, states that:

*Even by the year 1900 concertinas must have still been regarded as newcomers to traditional music. However, they were cheap, readily available, and very suitable for the playing of the music, so that when they were first introduced along the Shannon Estuary they seemed to catch on and spread at a fast pace.<sup>4</sup>*

The late concertina player Tommy McCarthy once said that, “they say that it came in here with the fishermen. How long back that was I don't know. I heard bits of these stories, you know.”<sup>5</sup> Several other Clare musicians and historians have repeated this estuarine story, but there are problems, especially when the nationwide and global situation for the instrument is considered. The German concertina arrived in England by 1846. By the early 1850s, it had arrived and was being marketed halfway around the world—in Australia, New Zealand, North America, South Africa and even parts of the

remote African interior. Both British and German merchant ships were bringing these instruments to major and minor ports all over the world, where they were rapidly dispersed to shopkeepers along the normal lines of land commerce, typically by trains and by horse-drawn wagons. Documents introduced below show that the story was little different in Ireland, where the concertina was marketed in Dublin by the early 1850s, and in other cities soon after. The folk memory in Clare may indeed have some validity, as it is known that mariners were early users of the instrument (see Chapter 4)—but normal commercial channels were the main source of concertinas in Ireland.

In the late nineteenth century, German and Anglo-German concertinas were at or very near the forefront of music played for rural social dances—which at that time were dominated by the latest fashions in ballroom-style dances—in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and of course England. These ballroom dances, most of which had originated in continental Europe, were not just for city swells but for working-class farmers, shepherds, graziers, and tradesmen living in the most remote parts of the Australian outback and the African veldt. They became significant parts of rural Irish traditional culture as well, and were danced along with older jigs and reels in rural houses, often to the music of a solo concertina player. In the early twentieth century the rural Irish dance venue changed from house dances to dances in public halls, and in the late twentieth century dances partly gave way to festivals and pub sessions as principal venues for the playing of Irish music. As will be discussed below, each of these changes had a profound effect not only on the popularity of the concertina, but on the techniques by which it was played.

In this chapter we will carefully examine rural and urban appearances of the concertina that were documented in the newspapers and journals of people who lived in that period. Not all of that written commentary is positive, and neither is it complete. For example, that most prolific and respected of musician/

historians of nineteenth-century Irish music, Francis O'Neill, gives only a single mention to the concertina in all his writing on Irish music, even though multiple accounts show that the concertina and the fiddle were the two most common instruments in western Ireland at the time. The cold shoulder that O'Neill gave the concertina can only be explained by examining the cultural setting and issues of the time.

The concertina's story in Ireland is not all about County Clare, even given the county's paramount role in preserving the music of the concertina in the middle twentieth century. For example, William Mullaly, a prominent and highly skilled Anglo player of the 1920s who was the first Irish concertina player to make commercial recordings, hailed from near Mullingar, County Westmeath, in the eastern part of the Irish midlands. Neighbors around him played concertina as well, and taught him to play. How extensive was that playing population in greater Ireland? When did they start playing the instrument in significant numbers? What types of people played it, and where? What sort of music did they play, and why did the vast majority of them give it up? And perhaps most importantly, why did only Clare concertina playing survive as a more-or-less unbroken tradition?

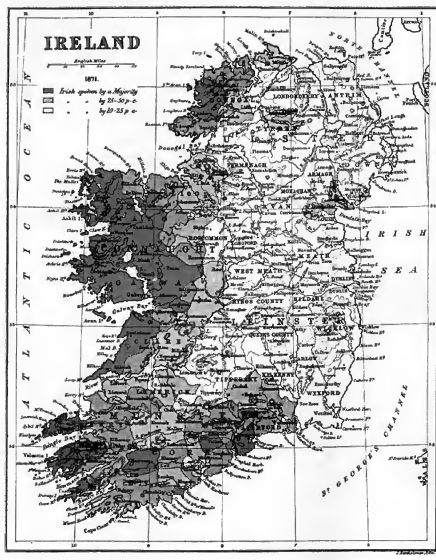


Figure 1. Irish-speaking areas of Ireland, 1871. Gray-shaded areas were still predominantly Irish-speaking at that time, and white areas were predominantly English-speaking (see legend). From E.G. Ravenstein, On the Celtic Languages of the British Isles: A Statistical Survey, in *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, vol. 42, no. 3, (September, 1879), p. 584.

### A brief review of Irish cultural geography at the time of the concertina's arrival

The concertina in its first century in Ireland was a witness to three particularly important events in the country's history: the Great Famine, the rapid shift to the English language in most areas following that famine, and the emergence of the independent Irish Republic. Of these, the first two are of particular importance in understanding the context of the concertina's arrival and establishment.

During the peak years of the Great Famine (1845-1851), it is estimated that over eight hundred thousand Irish perished of starvation and famine-related diseases, and another one and one-half million emigrated. The overall population of Ireland declined by over 20 percent in those five years alone.<sup>6</sup> Peasants living in western areas, where much of the land is of poor agricultural quality, were decidedly poorer as a group than their eastern countrymen before the Famine, and thus were much harder hit by it. In Clare the population losses exceeded a horrific 25 percent. In the midlands and east, effects were also strongly felt, although the Famine did not cause the population to decline in relatively more prosperous Dublin, the seat of British rule. In fact, the population of the city grew during those years as some refugees from outlying affected areas fled to the capital for relief. For this reason it is not surprising that the earliest references to the concertina's use in Ireland, both of the English system and the German concertina, come from Dublin.

In the years leading up to the Famine, the country was predominantly Irish-speaking in all areas except the capital and its environs as well as the areas of Scottish-English plantation in Ulster, although the language was weakening its hold in many areas. Following the great human tragedy of the Famine years, a desperately impoverished peasantry continued to emigrate, a process that continued for many decades. In the United States alone, roughly one and one-half million Irish immigrants arrived from 1845 to 1854, an additional million between 1855 and 1870, and another one and one-half million from 1870 to 1900.<sup>7</sup> Among those who stayed behind,

the great shift toward the use of the English language picked up pace, with attendant changes in folk traditions and the rhythm of everyday life. This dramatic shift in language and culture pressed westward from significantly Anglicized Dublin in a great wave; by 1870 a very approximate dividing line reached about midway across the country.<sup>8</sup> Figure 1 shows the distributions in 1871 of predominantly English-speaking areas (in white) and predominantly Irish-speaking areas (in dark gray); the lighter gray zones are transitional. A half century later, the wave had surged still farther westward to the Atlantic coast, leaving only small remnant areas of predominantly Irish speakers among the westernmost rocky landscapes of counties Kerry, Galway, Mayo, and Donegal, as well as a few small pockets elsewhere. For the most part, those areas constitute the current *Gaeltacht*. This huge cultural shift affected much more than just language, and decimated much of traditional culture. Contemporary Irish writers in the late nineteenth century were consumed with a sense of loss by the decline in traditional poetry, music, and dance. The great Chicago collector Francis O'Neill realized that his émigré musical sources from the streets of Chicago were the flotsam and jetsam of that wave's destruction of a culture's heritage:

*Where a generation ago a wealth of folk music was the common possession of the peasantry, now scarcely a fraction of it is remembered. We are told by our optimistic orators and rhymers that Irish music will speedily resume its sway when Irishmen govern Ireland. Let us hope so—but how? When? Where? Who is to teach?*<sup>9</sup>

As the German concertina took root in the 1850s, 1860s and 1870s, Ireland was comprised of at least two cultural groups with a very fuzzy and locally convoluted boundary between them. People in English-speaking eastern areas were prone to dance to the latest musical trends from European ballrooms, as well as listen to new songs from the English music halls and, increasingly, the emerging pop culture from America. (In the middle-to-late nineteenth century, this included the minstrels craze,

followed in the early twentieth by ragtime, jazz, and tunes from "Tin-Pan Alley"). This relatively more "Anglicized" (or perhaps "globalized") cultural group has continued to grow right down to modern times, as a spin of any Irish radio dial will demonstrate. Western areas, either still Irish-speaking or with still-vivid and living memories of the old ways, became the last strongholds of Gaelic culture simply by not being changed (or not being changed as thoroughly) by the cultural wave of Anglicization. The chief reasons that that change was slowed in the west included continued poverty as well as overall remoteness from the main lanes of commerce emanating from Dublin. Regardless of the degree of remoteness, these cultural boundaries were extremely diffuse, and some degree of Anglicization or globalization was to be found everywhere. Even in bastions of traditional culture in western Ireland today, many things now thought of as typically "Irish" include those that were brought in from "foreign" global popular culture in the nineteenth century, including set dances (quadrilles), polkas, waltzes—and concertinas, banjos, and accordions. The cultural battle lines of the Gaelic League in 1900 excluded these "foreign" items, although they are generally accepted and even celebrated as part of "traditional" music and dance today.

Layered on top of Irish- and English-speaking Ireland in the 1870s were the still-ensconced English and Anglo-Irish landed gentry, who largely looked east to Dublin and London for their cultural signals. Through the extensive system all over Ireland, of "big houses" and the staff they employed—as well as through the military garrisons that kept them in place—much nineteenth-century global pop culture made its way into the heart of Gaelic Ireland. This situation was in rapid flux throughout the period of adoption and heyday of German- and Anglo-German concertinas.

## Arrival and Establishment

### Arrival and use of the English concertina

In a sense, the English concertina is a bit of a sideshow to the discussion at hand. Aligned at its beginning with the elite in a country then known for crushing poverty, the English concertina never developed a large following in Ireland, and it was the humble German concertina that eventually won over most of the populace. Nonetheless, the English concertina not only arrived first, but it was through the auspices of an English concertina maker in Dublin that the earliest German concertinas seem to have been imported to Ireland.

The English concertina came to Ireland within a very few years of its invention by Sir Charles Wheatstone in 1829. In its first twenty years it was handmade by Wheatstone's firm in England in very small numbers and tended to be played by the wealthy gentry who could afford its purchase. One of the concertina's first public proponents was Italian-born Giulio Regondi (1822-1872), a classical guitarist and child prodigy who began performing on the English concertina in 1834. As reported by Thomas Lawrence,<sup>10</sup> Regondi was a frequent visitor to Ireland over the period 1834 to 1861; Figure 2 shows an advertisement of his appearance in Belfast in November 1835. Of his concert in Wexford on January 28 1835 a local newspaper reported that:

*This wonderful boy gave a musical entertainment on Wednesday evening to a fashionable audience who appeared to be quite enraptured with his unparalleled performance; he may truly be called a phenomenon in the musical world; the guitar in his hands becomes a different instrument from what even excellent judges can imagine and when we state that he is not apparently ten years old we do so merely to add interest to his performance. . . . Master Regondi also performs on a newly invented instrument called a concertina, which besides being of great power produces the sweetest and most varied tones. It is one of the most beautiful inventions our musical world can boast of.*<sup>11</sup>



**MASTRO REGONDI,**  
**The Celebrated Performer on the**  
**Guitar and Concertina.**

**P**REVIOUS to his leaving the North of Ireland for Dublin and England, will have the honour of giving a **FAREWELL CONCERT** in Belfast—the day and other particulars will be duly announced in future Advertisements.

**SIGNOR REGONDI** will assist his son both in the Vocal and Instrumental parts.

Terms for instruction on the Guitar and in Singing, during his short stay here, may be known at his residence, No. 36, UPPER ARTHUR-STREET. Belfast, 9th Nov. 1835.

Figure 2. Regondi, the earliest noted performer on the English concertina, was a frequent visitor to Ireland. This advertisement of an appearance of his in Belfast is from *The Belfast News-Letter* of Tuesday, November 10, 1835.

**JOSEPH SCATES,**  
THE  
**ORIGINAL MANUFACTURER OF CONCERTINAS,**  
 FORMERLY OF 33, NEW BOND STREET, AND FOR THE LAST  
 TWELVE YEARS ESTABLISHED AT  
**27, COLLEGE GREEN, DUBLIN,**

Continues to manufacture his CONCERTINAS with all the late Improvements, and of the same Superior Tone and Quality as those which have gained such universal favour during the last eighteen years, and which have recently obtained the Paris and American Prize Medals.

The Prices of Ordinary Instruments range from 8 to 12 Guineas each.

And with Gold Notes, which never require tuning, and cannot be broken, £20.

By other Makers, with Full Compass, 35s., 40s., 60s., 80s., and 100s.

**ORDERS FROM INDIA AND THE COLONIES,**

With Remittances made payable at the Royal Bank, Dublin, will be Despatched within Seven Days.

J. S. provides a safe Packing Case lined with tin for 13s; and the extra Charges for Carriage and Insurance Overland to India are 40s.

**Giulio Regondi's Celebrated Works for the Concertina.**

His **RUDIMENTI**, also, his **NEW METHOD**, originally published by **JOSEPH SCATES** at 10s. 6d. each, and which are his Copyright, may be had, post free, at the Reduced Rate of 7s. 6d. each; and on the usual Terms to the Trade.

**PIANOFORTES** and **HARMONIUMS** by all the best Makers for Sale and Exportation.

**JOSEPH SCATES,**  
**27, COLLEGE GREEN, DUBLIN.**

**NEW METHOD,**  
 FOR THE  
**Concertina.**  
*Composed by*  
**GIULIO REGONDI.**

*See the title.* Price 10/6

**DUBLIN.**  
*Joseph Scates, Concertina Manufacturer, Fane Street, Harcourt's & Myers Warehouse, 27, COLLEGE GREEN, (OPPOSITE THE BANK)*

**LONDON.**  
*Messrs Wood & Co Foreign Music Warehouse, 12, MARK LANE SQUARE.*

*The Publishers Joseph Scates reserves the right of Translating this Work.*

*Also sent to India*  
*27 1/2 lbs of Superior Goods for Soldiers in the Convention, with French Guide-Directions, Prepared by Giulio Regondi Price 1/6 each, at the 1/4 weight.*

Figure 3. The cover page of Regondi's *New Method for the Concertina*, Dublin, Joseph Scates, 1857. From Randall Merris, 2005.

Figure 4. Advertisement and price list for Joseph Scates' Dublin shop, in the *Musical Directory, Register and Almanac*, London, 1862. With thanks to Stuart Eydmann and the Concertina Library.

A later concert in Belfast on May 5, 1835, resulted in this glowing review:

*In his hands the instrument called the **Concertina** emitted a succession of sweet and silvery sounds, now and then resembling the tones of the Dulciana stop of a well tuned organ; and again the trembling modulations of the Eolian harp. They seemed to float in the air, as if they were the echo of some Seraph's voice; and when the little Regondi, thus employed, stood before us; with his locks waving on his shoulders and glittering like sunbeams, sparkingly reflected from a surface of gold, our imagination converted him into a juvenile Apollo, charming his audience, at once, with the graces of his person and the harmony of his strains.<sup>12</sup>*

A concert in Londonderry met with a prophetic comment on the concertina:

*We need not notice in detail all the performances; but his Last Rose of Summer must not be wholly passed over. He played it with much taste on a new instrument called the **concertina**, which appears to us to be an improvement, and a very decided one, on the accordion. It is a pleasing instrument though of no great variety and is likely to come into very general use.<sup>13</sup>*

During later visits, Regondi taught pupils in Dublin, and he and Joseph Scates prepared and published a tutor for the English concertina (Figure 3).<sup>14</sup>

Another early visiting performer on this instrument was George Case of London, who performed at the Theatre Royal in Dublin on September 25, 1841.<sup>15</sup> Case, a trained classical violinist, later not only wrote tutors for the English concertina, but manufactured the instrument as well.

The first person to make and sell concertinas in Ireland was Joseph Scates (ca. 1818-1899). He was an employee of the Wheatstone firm in London who left to set up an independent and rival firm, also in London, when the original Wheatstone patent expired in 1844. Scates sold this business to George Case in 1850 and moved

to Dublin, where he was listed in the City Directory as a "Professor of the Concertina" at 28 Westmoreland Street from 1850 to 1851. He opened a musical instrument shop at 26 College Green by 1852. At the Irish Industrial Exhibition of 1853, he exhibited three English-system instruments of his own manufacture, as well as several made by Wheatstone.<sup>16</sup> Figure 4 includes a price list of his English-system instruments from 1862. He was a skilled performer on the English concertina, and the following was said of an 1859 concert in Dublin's Antient Room:

*Mr. Joseph Scates gave his first grand vocal and instrumental concert yesterday evening, before a very numerous and fashionable audience. The programme selected was most judicious, and the artistes performing were warmly received. . . . Mr. Scates is a perfect master of the **concertina**, which beautiful instrument he handled with such refined taste and feeling as to enlist the full favour of his audience.<sup>17</sup>*

Scates operated at a variety of addresses in Dublin before closing shop in December 1865; he sold his business to Cramer and Company of London. He taught lessons for a time at that company's Dublin establishment and at his private residence on 35 Upper Baggot Street.<sup>18</sup> He later retired to Brighton England, where he died in 1899.<sup>19</sup>

Scates had a competitor in the sale of English concertinas in Dublin during this period. John Bray operated a *Harp, Pianoforte, Military Musical Instrument, and Music Warehouse* in the same neighborhood by 1850, and probably as early as 1840, at 26 Westmoreland Street. At that shop he sold English concertinas made by Scates and Wheatstone at least as early as 1852 (Figure 5 is an advertisement from that year). He advertised himself as a "Professor of the Instrument" and a "pupil of Sig. Giulio Regondi," with instruments for sale "at prices that will defy competition."<sup>20</sup> After some years of operating his musical instrument business, Bray gave it up in 1870, and began to teach on the "Regondi System" at his office on 42 Great Brunswick Street.<sup>21</sup> He sold one of his prized concertinas in 1877, after which he seems to have



**Harp, Pianoforte, Military Musical Instrument, and Music  
Warehouse,  
26, WESTMORLAND-STREET.**

**J. BRAY**

**R**ESPECTFULLY informs the Nobility and the Public that, having finished the Improvements making in his Establishment, he invites an inspection of his Stock of Pianofortes, principally Collard and Collard, Broadwood, and other respectable London Makers, with extended Keys in Treble and Bass, and all the recent improvements, which he will dispose of, with every engagement to satisfy Purchasers, at the London Manufacturers' Price.

J. B. has also imported some splendid Harmoniums, with the Patent Percussion, invented and manufactured by Alexander of Paris, having the power of an Organ, and not requiring Tuning; Concertina on improved principle, by Wheatstone, Scates, &c.; Cornopeans, by Benson and others; Violins, Guitars, Flutes, and every Musical Instrument; and the newest Music constantly on Sale, 25 and 30 per cent. under the marked Price, genuine Editions, at

**26, Westmorland-street (near Carisle Bridge).**

Figure 5. This advertisement for John Bray's Musical Warehouse, with English concertinas on offer, came from the liner notes of the book *Three Days on the Shannon*, by W.F. Wakeman, Hodges and Smith, Dublin, 1852.

disappeared from the public record.<sup>22</sup>

Largely because of its expense and its hand-crafted manufacture in relatively small numbers during this period, the English concertina was initially an instrument of the moneyed elites, with all that that categorization meant in nineteenth-century Ireland. Allan Atlas has indicated that members of the aristocratic Clare families of Vandeleur, Toler, and Abinger all purchased Wheatstone concertinas in the 1840s and 1850s. The Vandeleurs were infamous for mass evictions and house leveling in the Kilrush area during an effort to eradicate rundale-system farms.<sup>23</sup>

By the 1860s, the elite in England, Scotland, and elsewhere began to drop the English-system instrument, perhaps because concertinas had by then been tainted by association with the cheap and decidedly working-class German concertina, of which more below. The English system as well as various types of duet systems then became staples of the middle-class music halls and variety shows.<sup>24</sup> By 1889, as written in a review that followed a highbrow concert for London and North-Western Railway officers,

"this instrument unfortunately is now seldom heard on Dublin concert platforms."<sup>25</sup> As evidence of its now-reduced status, an 1872 Dublin variety show in the "Rotundo Gardens" listed "Herr Christoff on the low rope, Professor Boyd and his Wonderful Troupe of Trained Dogs, 'double-voiced' vocalist Charles Woodman, and Campbell and Benzona's Christy Minstrels," who performed ballads and comic songs taken from popular American minstrel shows. As part of the minstrel act, there was an English concertina solo by A. Campbell, followed by a "Walk-round Festival Dance" and a "Grand Display of Fireworks."<sup>26</sup> Other appearances of the instrument include a mention in the account of the 1872 Dublin Exhibition, where a "Special Day" of concerts included an organ recital, military band concerts, and a "Grand

Vocal and Instrumental Concert" that featured M. E. Walker on Concertina.<sup>27</sup> The Abercorn Ladies' College, Harcourt Street, Dublin, catered to women who aspired to improve their social and artistic skills, offering tutoring in "Organ, Piano, Harp, Guitar, and English Concertina," in addition to singing and drawing classes, as well as training in English and other European languages.<sup>28</sup>

At the turn of the century, the English concertina as well as its cousin, the Duet, were commonly played in music halls such as the Tivoli Theatre in Dublin, where the English-born "King of the Concertina" and inventor of the Duet instrument that bears his name, Professor J. H. MacCann, performed in 1902,<sup>29</sup> as did blind concertina soloist Martin Henderson. Henderson was also English (and played an Anglo-German concertina).<sup>30</sup> At that same venue in 1908, English-born duet player Alexander Prince was "loudly applauded,"<sup>31</sup> and in 1921 Englishman "Jack Clevenor, described as the 'wizard of the concertina' extracted some rare music from concertinas of various sizes, and was greatly

appreciated."<sup>32</sup> A 1909 Tivoli variety act included "the feats capably accomplished by 'Ernesto,' juggler and equilibrist, [including that of] climbing up and down a ladder, balancing a lighted lamp on his forehead and at the same time playing on two concertinas."<sup>33</sup>

Because of a strong legacy of alignment with classical and music hall genres as well as its double-action mechanics, the English-system concertina never made any appreciable inroads into Irish traditional music, although small numbers of current players in Ireland use it.

### German and Anglo-German concertinas arrive

Although the German concertina was clearly available in England by the late 1840s (see Chapter 1), the earliest references to its sale

in Ireland date from the early 1850s, which is similar to the dates of first-observed arrivals in the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. The earliest mention yet found of the German concertina in Ireland is in an advertisement for "Symond's German concertina tutors," priced at one shilling, from the *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* (Dublin), dated Tuesday, November 1, 1853 (Figure 6). This "sighting" indicates these imported instruments were available in Ireland at least by that year. Joseph Scates was selling them in his Musical Warehouse at 26 College Green by at least 1854, as an advertisement from *The Belfast News-Letter* published Wednesday, December 13, 1854 attests (Figure 7). The rather high price mentioned for a "good German concertina," twenty shillings, was to drop precipitously in coming years and decades. It is of interest that Scates was already shipping these instruments to all parts of Ireland.

An early reference to its use in Dublin is found in the journal of a British non-commissioned officer, James Hawker, who was posted to a Dublin garrison in 1854:

*While in Dublin I was paid a compliment from a temperance point of view. . . . One evening - October 25 - after reading the Charge of the Light Brigade, I was playing my concertina and the men were dancing when Captain Vivian came to the door.*

*"Corporal Hawker," he shouted. "Where did you get that thing?"*

*"I bought it, Sir," I told him.*

*"Surely not out of your pay?" he said.*

*"Yes Sir," I replied. "I bought it to keep the men out of the canteen. It cost me ten shillings."*

*He put five shillings in my hand, a reward for setting the men a good example.<sup>34</sup>*

From this reference we can see that the concertina was already easily available in 1854, and that it was already being used for what will be its main purpose, dancing. It would seem likely that some of Hawker's fellow soldiers were local Irish recruits.

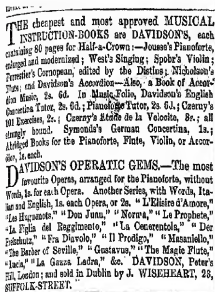


Figure 6. An advertisement for Symond's tutors for the German concertina, from *The Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* (Dublin), Tuesday, November 1, 1853. This is the earliest known reference to the German concertina in Ireland, and closely matches the earliest known date of arrival of the instrument in Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa.

**MUSICAL CHRISTMAS GIFTS.**  
 Concertinas, Guitars, Musical Boxes, Accordions,  
 Flutinas, Cornopeans, Sax Horns, Flutes, Violins, &c.  
**JOSEPH SCATES, 26, COLLEGE-GREEN,** invites attention  
 to his Concertinas, with the complete semi-tonic scale  
 and double action. They are the same as performed upon by  
 him in Ireland's Great Exhibition, and have recently gained  
 the American Prize Medal, also honourable mention in the  
 Paris Exhibition.  
 He also offers the largest assortment of best Paris Flutinas,  
 Accordions, German Concertinas, Organic Flutinas, with  
 keys like the Pianoforte, &c., from Seven Shillings to  
 Twelve Guineas each. On receipt of a Post-office Order for  
 Twenty Shillings a good German Concertina, with self-  
 instructor, will be forwarded to any part.  
 Every kind of Musical Instrument tuned, repaired or  
 exchanged.  
**JOSEPH SCATES,**  
**26, COLLEGE-GREEN.**  
**(Opposite the Bank.)**

Figure 7. An advertisement for German concertinas, among other items, at Joseph Scates' shop in Dublin. However, he emphasizes his stock of the more expensive English system concertinas. From *The Belfast News-Letter*, Wednesday, December 13, 1854.

Joseph Scates published a tutor for the German concertina in Dublin in the early 1850s (*Instruction Book for the Improved German Concertina*).<sup>35</sup> Personal tutoring was also available; an advertisement for a music teacher in Belfast in 1859 lists instruction in both English and German concertinas (Figure 8). Such instruction targeted the urban middle class.

**M U S I C.**  
 Mr. C. D. GORDON, 30, Fleet Street and 5, York  
 Street, Belfast, Organist of the Parish Church,  
 Bangor, begs to inform his Friends and the Public  
 that he continues to give Tuition upon the Piano-  
 forte and Singing, Violin, Guitar; also the English  
 and German Concertina.  
 Mr. G. attends Dramore each Wednesday.  
 3723

Figure 8. Lessons for both English and German concertinas were to be found in Belfast by 1859, when the following advertisement appeared in the *The Era* (London, England), Sunday, May 15, 1859.

Prices for German concertinas were dropping throughout the 1850s and 1860s. John Bray sold German concertinas in 1860 for six shillings—quite a reduction from the twenty-shilling instrument sold by Scates six years earlier—while his English concertinas sold for three and one-half guineas and up, which was at least twelve times more than the price of his German concertina (Figure 9). By 1862, Scates sold German concertinas for as cheaply as five shillings (Figure 10). He had a variety of German concertinas for sale, and some went for as much as one pound. The variety included “Organ” models (double-reeded, in octaves) and “Celestial” ones (double-reeded, in addition to “Plain” single-reeded ones. By 1863 prices for the least expensive of German instruments dropped to three and one-half shillings in 1863 (Scates<sup>36</sup>), and to three shillings by 1868.<sup>37</sup> According to a historical currency calculator devised by economist Randall Merris with Robert Gaskins,<sup>38</sup> three shillings in 1868 is very approximately equivalent to sixty-five pounds UK in the year 2000—an amount that a working-class person of today could afford if it were deemed desirable or necessary enough. Such prices made German concertinas affordable to ever larger portions of the population, and the numbers of vendors grew with the popularity of the instrument. By the late 1860s and early 1870s, there were at least four other sellers of these instruments besides Scates and Bray: David Baldwin of Henry Street; Russell's on Westmoreland Street; O'Reilly's at 31 Wellington Quay; and Butler's at 11 Ellis Quay. Baldwin was a *general* merchant, not a musical specialist, indicating that German instruments were becoming popular mass-

**MUSICAL PRESENTS AND NEW YEAR'S GIFTS.**  
**AT 26, WESTMORELAND-STREET,**  
 (Near Carlisle-bridge.)  
**J. B. BRAY** begs to announce new importations of the following instruments:—  
**PIANO-FORTES,**  
 Semi-Grand, Cottage, Square, and Grand Square, by COLLARD, Broadwood, Cramer, and other makers of celebrity.  
**HARMONIUMS,**  
 By Alexandre, of Paris, and Whistlers, from eight guineas, with One Stop.  
**CONCERTINAS,**  
 English, Forty-eight Keys, and Double Action, from Three and a half Guineas upwards. German ditto, from 6s.; Book of Instructions included.  
 \* \* \* \* \* Just received a large Stock of the newest Music, from London, including all the Albums for 1860 at considerably reduced prices.  
 Music a little sold, 3d. and 6d. a piece.  
 \* \* \* \* \* Several good Second-hand Pianos, from Four Guineas. Dittos for hire, at One Guinea per Quarter.  
**J. B. BRAY** respectfully solicits inspection of the above.  
**26, WESTMORELAND-STREET.**

Figure 9. Advertisement for John Bray's musical instruments, from the *Irish Times* of January 14, 1860. German concertinas were selling for as low as six shillings.

**ELEGANT MUSICAL PRESENTS**  
**FOR CHRISTMAS AND THE NEW YEAR.**  
**JOSEPH SCATES,**  
**16 WESTMORELAND STREET,**  
 Having devoted the whole of his New Premises to business, is enabled to offer a large and attractive Stock of  
 Brandy Flautores, from ... 25 Guineas to £20  
 Drawingroom Harmoniums, from ... 10 Guineas to £75  
 Collard and Kirkman Flautores (that have been hired), ... £25 to £35  
 Portable Folding Harmoniums ... £3  
 Organ Accordion, on Pedal Stand ... £5 to £15  
 Seraphina Angelica, very portable ... £5 6s  
 English Concertinas, as played by J. Scates  
 In the Art Exhibition and Dublin Concerts 2 Guineas to £12  
 Organ Concertinas, No 1, 10s.; No 2, 20s.; No 3, £4 4s  
 Celestial Concertinas, No 1, 10s.; No 2, 20s.; No 3, £2 6s  
 Plain Concertinas and Flautores, from 5s to £1  
 Musical Boxes in great variety ... £2 to £10  
 Every instrument guaranteed perfect. An inspection invited.  
**J. SCATES'S New Music Salon.**  
**16 WESTMORELAND STREET.**

Figure 10. Yuletide advertisement for concertinas and other musical instruments at Joseph Scates' Dublin shop, from the *Irish Times* of December 22, 1862. Organ concertinas were German concertinas with double reeds tuned in octaves, and celestial concertinas were double-reeded with tremolo tuning.

market items by the end of the 1860s.

As was discussed in Chapter 1, English concertina makers were obviously impressed by the sales potential of the cheap German instruments, and began to improve them in order to capture a share of the market. One of the principle improvements made by the English builders included applying the more responsive reeds and action of the English-system

concertinas to the German fingering system. English concertina maker and repairer George Jones (1832-1919) built his first "Anglo-German" concertina with a German fingering system in the early 1850s, and built one with a third row and 26 keys by 1854. Irish dealer Joseph Scates placed one of the first sizeable orders for these improved, Anglo-German instruments with Jones, who then began to produce them in quantity by 1862.<sup>39</sup> The London-based Lachenal firm began construction as early as 1863,<sup>40</sup> and Dublin merchant John Bray began selling "Anglo-German" instruments that same year.<sup>41</sup> By 1868 the Dublin firm O'Reilly's was selling 20-keyed "Anglo-German" models for two pounds sterling, a much higher price than that for the German-made instruments he sold.<sup>42</sup>

As popular usage of both German and Anglo-German concertinas expanded, not only in Ireland but in England, Scotland, and the United States, more and more tutors for these instrument appeared in London, Glasgow, New York, and Boston.<sup>43</sup> As Stewart Eydmann notes of the Scottish tutors:

*The cover illustrations of many of these editions ... show the concertina in "up-market" settings and, although this may have been in reflection of the reality of its use, it is more likely that they sought to sell the image of upper middle-class respectability. The output of the Glasgow companies can be read ... as an indication of the popularity of the instrument in Scotland at the time.<sup>44</sup>*

The Glasgow publishing firm "Cameron Brothers" (later "Cameron and Ferguson") published many of these tutors and placed advertisements for them in the endpapers of their nonmusical books. Some of these nonmusical books were especially aimed at Irish readers and those interested in Ireland. For example, the 1869 nonfiction volume, *The History of Ireland: From the Treaty of Limerick to the Present Time* contains advertisements for twenty-four German concertina tutors, four of which were written with Irish tastes in mind:

*Sixty Irish Songs for the Concertina, with the Words and Music*

*The Green Flag of Ireland National Songs for the Concertina, with the Words and Music*

*100 Irish Airs, marked and figured for the 10, 20, and 28 keyed Concertina. With complete instructions and scales*

*100 Moore's Irish Melodies, marked and figured for 10, 20, 22, and 28 keyed concertina; containing the most popular of these exquisite National Airs*

The cover of the first of these is pictured in Figure 11. The gentleman shown at the left is holding what appears to be an eight-sided German concertina of the type manufactured by C. F. Reichel (see Chapter 1). Each of these books carried the price of sixpence, and free shipping was available by post for seven stamps. It seems very likely that some of these tutors found homes in English-speaking parts of Ireland during the 1860s, and that the players of those tunes were probably members of the emerging English-speaking Irish middle class.

By the late 1860s, the inexpensive, German-made concertina was clearly reaching a much broader audience than the English instrument had. In Dublin in the popular Rotundo Room, which catered to the city's emerging middle class, a "Grand Musical Contest" was held in 1868:

*On the above night Professor Miller will give a Silver Cup to the Best Sentimental Singer. A Splendid **Concertina** to the Best Concertina Player. A Beautiful Silver Cake to the Best Comic Singer.*<sup>45</sup>

A later contest at that same venue, described below, made it clear that the instruments played were very likely *German* concertinas. In Belfast in 1869, a similar contest included a concertina competition:

*The programme issued by Professor Millar of his entertainment to-night at the Ulster Hall is sure to attract a crowded audience. Apart from the*

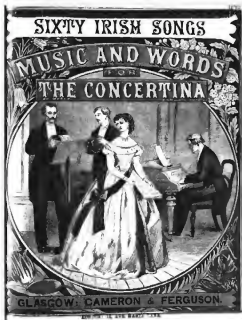


Figure 11. Cover page to one of Cameron and Ferguson's Irish-oriented concertina music books, published in Glasgow, 1860s. The earliest tutors and advertisements for the German concertina targeted the middle class. From Stuart Fydmann, *The Life and Times of the Concertina*, [www.concertina.com](http://www.concertina.com).

*very tempting list of valuable prizes, and the rich amusement which the contests in singing, dancing, **concertina**-playing, and conundrum-making are sure to provoke, Mrs. Millar's vocal performance is in itself a most enjoyable treat . . . Taken for all in all, the performance is likely to be a very attractive one.*<sup>46</sup>

But what of the countryside? Documents are few, but telling. The following account of 1868 shows that the German concertina was becoming popular with the rural folk of western Ireland:

*At Nenagh (County Tipperary) Petty Sessions on Saturday two performers of street music, who came from the county of Clare, were severely dealt with by the magistrates for playing Fenian tunes on a **concertina**. It was proved that a*

*crowd which followed them joined in chorus. They pleaded ignorance of the character of the tunes, but the Bench did not accept the excuse, and sent them to gaol for two months.<sup>1</sup>*

It was not the last time the concertina was to be used in Ireland's political and social struggles, as we shall see. The Nenagh court case of 1868 is a harbinger of a remarkable and nationwide adoption of the German concertina across the country's social, political, and geographic landscape in the next few decades.

### Distribution and acceptance

Period documents show that the 1870s ushered in a golden era for Anglo-German concertinas in Ireland, in both English-speaking and still-Irish-speaking parts of the country. Sales of the instruments broadened from music shops to all sorts of merchandisers, and expanded to other parts of the country. Moreover, references to concertina players themselves began to appear in newspapers, books, and journals of the time. From these various sources a picture emerges of a popular boom in the German concertina in Ireland that is unrivaled by any other musical instrument of the era.

**IMPORTANT NOTICE**

**The Old Established PAWNBROKERS' SALE SHOPS, 41 SOUTH GEORGE'S STREET, And 168 GREAT BRUNSWICK STREET, (Opposite Queen's Theatre.)**

Great Bazaars—Feather Beds, Holsters, Pillows, Carpets and Hearth Rugs, Portmanteaus, Hat Cases, and Trunks, Cheap Boots and Shoes, Ladies' and Gentlemen's Old and New Clothing of every description: a large assortment of Concertinas, and other Musical Instruments; Jewellery, including Ladies' and Gentlemen's Gold and Silver Watches, New and Second-hand Albert and Long Chains; a large stock of Fine Gold Barrings and Masonic Ornaments, Aprons and Sashes.

n14,16      **PATRICK KEOGH, Proprietor.**

Figure 12. Advertisement for concertinas in a Dublin pawnbroker's shop, from the *Freeman's Journal* of December 5, 1872. By the 1870s, German concertinas were being sold by a wide variety of merchants rather than just by musical instrument dealers. That practice and ever-dropping prices made them available to large numbers of Irish people throughout the country.

The advertisement shown in Figure 12 was taken from the Dublin *Freeman's Journal* of December 5, 1872, and ran for several months. The "Old Established Pawnbroker's Sale Shops," run by Patrick Keogh advertised a variety of goods, including a "large assortment of Concertinas, and other Musical Instruments." This pawnbroker catered to the mass market rather than to a luxury or specialist clientele, and the concertina was just one of a long list of everyday commodities that he sold to the growing middle class in Dublin.

Not only pawnbrokers, but also hardware stores and even jewelry shops began to distribute the instruments; Figure 13 shows an advertisement from a 1904 Cork jewelry shop that carried melodeons and concertinas alongside its pocket watches.<sup>2</sup> Peggy Crotty, the daughter of noted Clare player Elizabeth Crotty, recalled of her mother's first concertina that:

*I think she bought her concertina at Corry's in Henry Street here in Kilrush. They used to sell the world of concertinas up there. 'T was a hardware shop and a pub as well. They used to sell fiddles and strings for fiddles and bicycles and everything. 'T was a great shop.<sup>3</sup>*

Also outside of Dublin, G. Morosini's *Pianoforte and Harmonium Warerooms* carried them in Kilkenny, Co. Kilkenny, by 1870.<sup>4</sup> Prices for German instruments continued to fall throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. General merchandiser C. L. Reis & Co. of 5 Grafton Street in Dublin advertised concertinas for as low as 2s. 6d. (two shillings sixpence or "half-a-crown") in April 1878, as did May's at 30 Stephen's Green in 1876. By 1898, according to a Clare concertinist quoted by Harry Bradshaw, "Concertinas were cheap then, you could get the smaller one for half-a-crown and the large one cost 6s. 6d. and if you minded it, it would last a few years anyway with constant playing."<sup>5</sup> Such prices allowed many working-class and rural people in all parts of the country to afford one; 2s. 6d. is approximately equivalent to £42 UK in the year 2000.

Distribution of these instruments in venues across the country occurred by other means as

**30/- Lever Watch for 21/-**

send this Watch to any address on receipt of 1/-

**1/- DEPOSIT**

and upon the payment of 20 weekly payments of 1/- each, making a total of 20/- the watch is given free. The first 1/- is given free. The watch is given free within 7 days. These watches are made in the best of materials. Chain is of fine steel. Order Price is only 1/- in full Cash. These watches are made in the best of materials. Chain is of fine steel. Order Price is only 1/- in full Cash. These watches are made in the best of materials. Chain is of fine steel. Order Price is only 1/- in full Cash.

**10/6 CONCERTINA OR 5/6**

Just as an advertisement we send this Melodion or Concertina to any address on receipt of 5/-

**5/- DEPOSIT**

and upon the payment of 4 weekly payments of 1/- each, making a total of 4/- the instrument is given free. The first 5/- is given free. The instrument is given free within 7 days. These instruments are made in the best of materials. Chain is of fine steel. Order Price is only 5/- in full Cash. These instruments are made in the best of materials. Chain is of fine steel. Order Price is only 5/- in full Cash.

**Real Silver Watch for 7/6**

Just as an advertisement we send this Watch to any address on receipt of 7/-

**7/- DEPOSIT**

and upon the payment of 6 weekly payments of 1/- each, making a total of 6/- the watch is given free. The first 7/- is given free. The watch is given free within 7 days. These watches are made in the best of materials. Chain is of fine steel. Order Price is only 7/- in full Cash. These watches are made in the best of materials. Chain is of fine steel. Order Price is only 7/- in full Cash.

**12/6 CONCERTINA FOR 8/-**

Just as an advertisement we send this Melodion or Concertina to any address on receipt of 8/-

**8/- DEPOSIT**

and upon the payment of 4 weekly payments of 2/- each, making a total of 8/- the instrument is given free. The first 8/- is given free. The instrument is given free within 7 days. These instruments are made in the best of materials. Chain is of fine steel. Order Price is only 8/- in full Cash. These instruments are made in the best of materials. Chain is of fine steel. Order Price is only 8/- in full Cash.

**7/6 Lever Watch for 4/6**

Just as an advertisement we send this Watch to any address on receipt of 4/-

**4/- DEPOSIT**

and upon the payment of 3 weekly payments of 1/- each, making a total of 3/- the watch is given free. The first 4/- is given free. The watch is given free within 7 days. These watches are made in the best of materials. Chain is of fine steel. Order Price is only 4/- in full Cash. These watches are made in the best of materials. Chain is of fine steel. Order Price is only 4/- in full Cash.



**The Master Jewellery Co., Cork.**

Figure 13. Advertisement for a Cork jeweler who also carried German melodeons and concertinas, from *The Southern Star*, September 24, 1904.

well. In 1862 Dublin, a “Grand Bazaar for the Relief of the Poor in the West” contained a large number of prizes, among which were “Celestial, Organ and other Concertinas.”<sup>6</sup> In a “Grand Drawing of Prizes” for the Ballinasloe, County Galway, Convent of Mercy on October 4, 1872, the eighth prize was a concertina awarded to Dr. McMullen of Queensland, who just missed a fat sheep, a gentleman’s saddle, a game of lawn croquet, and several other higher-ranked prizes.<sup>7</sup> Among a large assortment of prizes won at a raffle for the St. Joseph Convent in Longford, County Longford, in 1877, a Miss McDermott of that town came away with a concertina.<sup>8</sup> In the parish of Drimoleague, County Cork, on St. Stephen’s Day of 1892, a concertina was awarded as second prize in a track-and-field competition. First prize was a pair of boots.<sup>9</sup>

There is some information indicating that concertina raffles were also held in the late nineteenth century in the homes of farming folk of very limited means living in rural villages—showing yet another way that the concertina reached people with low incomes, and also demonstrating that it was reaching people who were deeply involved with traditional music. In 1885, an American visitor observed:

*I have known several cases where poor people wanting to thatch their cabin, perhaps, or to buy a pig without any means to do so, will organize a benefit, and thus obtain the necessary money. For this purpose a written notice will be carried round to the neighbors.*

*Sometimes they may just be told that Pat Murphy wants money to set the praties, and he will hold a benefit on Friday (or more generally, Sunday) night.*

*Perhaps fifty neighbors will come. Of course, so many could not possibly come into a small cabin at once; but they always take it in turn to “fut the floor”—for in step dancing, only a certain number can dance at a time.*

*These people will dance away all night, subscribe their mite, and never eat or drink anything, because, naturally, such poor people could not provide food for so many. It is not unusual for the neighbors each to bring some victuals with them, such as bread, tea, and sugar; and these will be divided and distributed as far as they will go.*

*Another kind of benefit for the same purpose is got by raffling—a goat, a turkey, or a concertina, perhaps a donkey, being the most general things to raffle. The winner will sometimes provide refreshments, often getting up a second raffle to do so.*<sup>10</sup>

In an 1877 contest at the Dublin Rotundo (Figure 14), a “German Concertina” was the prize for solo concertina playing at the “Great Band Contest and Concertina Contest.” The concertina competition was “confined to five paid-up competitors” who paid an entrance fee of three shillings and were given “ten minutes to play. Set of Waltzes and variations. Professionals excluded.” The concertina competition judge was a Mr. Thomas McCarthy. “Owing to the great demand [tickets will be sold in advance] to avoid any crushing at the doors.” Clearly, the German

concertina was by this time an item of appreciable public interest and appeal in Dublin, and had already begun to be accepted for playing dance music.<sup>57</sup>

By the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the concertina was at saturation point throughout the country. In the London journal *Musical News*, in 1897, someone wrote in bemoaning the state of music in England:

*We know how appreciation of music differs in different countries. The Anglo-Saxon, like most of his neighbours on this globe, is fond of it; but the Celt has from time immemorial had the gift of producing it with heartfelt fervour. In the poorest Irish cabins, whenever a musical instrument can be obtained, you will find one; and beautiful as are the native melodies of Scotland and Wales, those of Ireland are still more so. Why, then, if there be such a gift in the Irish people, should it not be cultivated as much as in England, or rather as much as possible?*

Of this sentiment, another writer sniffed:

*It is interesting to read his statement as to the old and accepted musical instruments to be found in the poorest Irish cabins. That is not my experience, which is rather that cheap German concertinas are the chief instruments occasionally seen. I cannot but regret that the national harp and bagpipes seem to have disappeared in favour of these importations from the Fatherland.*<sup>58</sup>

That preponderance of concertinas continued into the early twentieth century. According to Clare historians Muiris Ó Rocháin and Harry Hughes, interviewed in 1977:

*Here at one time, in the first three decades of this century, there was a concentration of fiddle and concertina playing. It was, as someone put it, a "nest of concertinas." Everyone seemed to play a concertina, it came as natural as mowing a meadow or drinking a medium of stout. The folk memory around here sparkles with anecdotes about fiddlers and concertina players.*<sup>59</sup>

Clare resident Bridget Dinan (b. ca. 1895), interviewed by Gearóid Ó hAllmhúráin in 1986, spoke of the German concertinas of her youth (she began to play at the age of seven):

*Concertinas were very cheap at the time. A concertina like that (holding up her own instrument) would cost six [shillings] and six pence and then you'd get a smaller concertina for younger people at half-a-crown. They were got in Ennis. 'T would last a fair length of time. 'T would last maybe a couple of years. Then you'd buy a new one. They were German concertinas and they were played nearly always on the outside row.*<sup>60</sup>

## GREAT BAND CONTEST AND CONCERTINA CONTEST, ROUND ROOM, ROTUNDO, SATURDAY EVENING, JUNE 9.

PRIZES for BRASS BANDS.  
1st Prize—A Cornet, 215 18s. 2nd Prize—A Clarinet,  
£7 7s, by Benson and Co., Easton-road, London.

The contest will be confined to the  
BRICKLAYERS', JAMES-STREET, and INCHICORE  
BRASS BANDS.

PRIZE for SOLO CONCERTINA PLAYING.  
A German Concertina.

Competition confined to Five paid-up Competitors.  
Entrance 1s. each. Ten minutes' play—Set of Waltzes  
and variations. Professionals excluded.  
Names and Entrance received up to June 7th, at 63  
Grafton-street.

Judge for Brass Bands:—  
The Bandmaster of the Royal Irish Constabulary.  
Judge of Concertina Playing:—

Mr. Thomas M'Carthy,  
Doors open at Seven. Performance at 7.30. Balcony,  
1s. 6d.; Body of Room, 1s.  
Instruments to be seen at 63 Grafton-street, whence  
going to the great demand for Tickets, they will be  
issued on This Day, To-morrow, and Saturday, at a  
reduced rate, to avoid any crushing at the doors. 10735

Figure 14. Newspaper advertisement for the "Great Band and Concertina Contest" of 1877, from the *Freeman's Journal*, Dublin. By the 1870s, use of the concertina was widespread throughout Ireland.



## German and Anglo-German Concertinas in the Cities

Other hotbeds of concertina playing existed outside of Clare, especially in the largest Irish cities of Dublin, Cork, and Belfast. We have already seen that there was enough of a critical mass of concertina players in Dublin to have a "Concertina Contest" in 1877 (Figure 14). In fact, the city was alive with concertina playing, as the following "sightings" demonstrate.

### Street music: buskers and beggars

In Victorian London the streets were thronged with the poor—some were foreign, but many more were local English people displaced by a sagging rural economy (Chapter 2). Dublin too had its share of home-grown street poor; the Famine had caused many rural Irish to try their luck in Dublin and other Irish cities, and others of course to emigrate. Continuing rural poverty in later decades only exacerbated the situation in the streets. For those who did not land a job in commerce, the military, or domestic service, options were few. Many eked out a living by busking and begging; the dividing line between the two was quite blurred. Others played in the streets for enjoyment. Playing music in the streets was a better alternative than playing music in the small, crowded flats in which many urban people of that era lived. In 1893 Cork, a correspondent of the local *Southern Star* railed against growing numbers of street musicians there:

*In writing this paper about street singers and musicians, I do not intend to class them with other itinerants . . . but at the same time I regret that so far as I am personally concerned I cannot express either satisfaction or pleasure at the "Sweet Sounds" I have heard. . . . [Street musicians] are very numerous—in fact too much so; and there is a variety in the instrument they play (!) that is by far too great. . . . A melodeon finds much favour with many street musicians. I like the melodeon, but I certainly would issue a degree of separation, if I had the power, between the melodeon and the street performer on it. As for the concertina, that poor instrument has*

*suffered fearfully at the hands—literally—of the street player. When a man thinks he can play no other instrument he purchases a concertina, in the fond belief that he can manage that. And he does, but very badly, but still he will persist in showing up before others.<sup>61</sup>*

A similar complaint in the 1876 *Irish Times* concerns "street" music played in the third-class compartments of the railway line to the then-fashionable seaside resorts of Kingstown and Bray near Dublin. This piece also includes a brief description of music at the annual Kingstown Regatta, a favorite outing of Dubliners of that era (Figure 15). The *Irish Times*, like other city newspapers at that time, favored the genteel and fashionable music of its upper- and middle-class customers, and gave short shrift to what we now call traditional Irish music. The mix of instruments in the following article leaves little doubt as to which type of music was being played:

*Sunday bands are a regular nuisance, but naught compared to the dulcet strains that one is forced to listen to on a journey to Kingstown or Bray on a Sunday. Why is it that passengers are forced to listen to such instruments as two-stringed fiddles, cracked concertinas, broken-winded bagpipes, and last, not least, coffee pots transformed into flageolets. Really the railway company should have more compassion and consideration for their third-class passengers. . . .*

*Dublin must have been a very quiet city yesterday, for there was a general meeting in Kingstown of all the squeaking pipes, hoarse fiddlers, derelict banjos, and consumptive concertinas that daily soothe the savage temperament of the citizen. On the Carlisle Pier they created a noise—to put it mildly—more striking than effective, and it never lagged in power or continuance. The two yacht clubs were, of course, the centre of attention, and on their balconies were grouped hundreds of the handsomest and most fashionable ladies of Dublin and its environs.<sup>62</sup>*



Figure 15. The Kingstown Regatta, 1863. Photograph courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.

That general theme resonated with others; another Kingstown railway passenger complained of “a class of itinerant beggars, in the shape of concertina players and bone rappers” on an 1878 trip.<sup>63</sup>

Some of these street musicians made a nuisance of themselves, as in an 1873 report of “street rowdyism” in Dublin:

*John McDonnell, Newcome-court, labourer, was charged with having been one of a disorderly mob who assaulted a man named John Downey, Great Britain-street. The prosecutor deposed to the fact that he was passing along Great Britain-street when the prisoner, who was in company with a number of persons who were playing a concertina, tripped him. On asking what he did it for, he was set upon by the prisoner, and the others closed around him and assaulted him. His Worship observed that he was ashamed of his namesake, whom he sent to prison for one month, and ordered to be kept at hard labour.*<sup>64</sup>

Although pub sessions are today often thought to be largely a twentieth-century invention, the association of concertinas with pubs was made early. An 1877 Dublin newspaper story entitled “Music and Refreshments” recalls that:

*Mary Brown was summoned by Inspector Darcy for keeping drink for sale on her unlicensed premises, at 51 Grattan-court. Inspector Darcy stated that about 1:30 pm on Sunday, the 15<sup>th</sup> of last month, he entered Mrs. Brown's house; he saw her throw something into a tub of water, and he saw a man, whom he believed to be her son, put a bottle of porter under his arm; there were seven bottles of porter behind a trunk, and two men were in the shop under the influence of drink. The defendant said she had the porter in the house for her son. Her son was the proprietor of a concertina, and he*

*was acquainted with a few boys who came to hear him play. Fined 10s.*<sup>65</sup>

Street playing continued well into the early twentieth century. In 1904 Dublin,

*Our “census” of Dublin was continued on Saturday night. We set out to approximate the number of street musicians, and, if possible, to see how much they earned. . . . Between seven o'clock and eight three Italian organs, seven singers, three concertina players were encountered. As far as could be seen the collections amounted to coppers from about 50 individuals.*<sup>66</sup>

A Dublin resident of 1911 lodged the following complaint in the *Irish Times*:

*Sir—I do not know the existing laws upon the subject—perhaps you or some of your readers will enlighten me—but how is it that in a prosperous suburb like the Pembroke, uproarious singing and concertina playing may be indulged in at any hour of the night or early morning on the roads? Last night there must have been an open-air concert in the banks of the Dodder. Is it absolutely necessary that the “lane” leading from Ballsbridge . . . to Donnybrook should be*

open all night? It is in this lane that the "musicians" chiefly congregate.<sup>67</sup>

Complaints about Dublin street begging included this in 1925:

*Yesterday there were many cross-Channel and provincial visitors in the city, and this is what they saw. On the North side of the Pillar an unwashed fiddler worked the crowds waiting for the north-bound trains. On the South side, where the crowds were larger, a gentleman with a dulcimer had a large audience. A short distance away, two men with a barrel organ and another with a concertina collected coppers along the sidewalks. Under the Ballast Office a woman with a child in her arms solicited help from all that passed.*<sup>68</sup>

Concertina playing was not limited to the southern counties, but was found in the north as well. Many concertina "sightings" of that area relate to political and social upheavals of the time (see below), but others show the same sort of broad popular support for the instrument as was found in the south. In a report on a Belfast automobile event of 1928, the Ulster Tourist Trophy Race, it was noted that:

*Belfast . . . is a city of mechanical men. She draws her sustenance from power-driven industries, and she has taken up the preparations for the great race . . . with wonderful zest. People have thronged to the vast course to witness even the early morning trial runs. Young men have watched all night, enlivening the long hours with the music of the concertina. When the race is run tomorrow, hundreds of thousands of manufacturers and merchants, artisans, factory workers and shipbuilding hands from all parts of the industrial North-East will crowd the track.*<sup>69</sup>

#### Charities, temperance, and the Salvation Army

The concertina was put to work very early on in the temperance movement, as in this Dublin event of 1860:

*Great Temperance Demonstration, in the Rotundo Gardens, on Friday Afternoon, at 3 o'clock, will be held the Juvenile Fete, under the auspices of the Metropolitan Total Abstinence Society, in which occasion addresses will be given by the Rev. J. B. Smyth, of Belfast, Mr. B. Benson, a coloured gentleman from the United States, and Mr. Jonathan Revell, the popular Band of Hope Missionary, who will also sing several melodies with the concertina. By the kind permission of Colonel Mylius the Band of the Royal Hibernian School will attend.*<sup>70</sup>

The concertina—undoubtedly an inexpensive German-made one—was also to be found even among Dublin's poorest citizens, the children of the workhouses. An 1872 account of "an annual feast given to the children of the South Dublin Union Workhouse" reported that:

*There can be no more touching or more agreeable sight than that of several hundred little boys and girls—waifs and strays of humanity—made happy by kindness, and giving way to unrestrained enjoyment, their every look expressive of delight and gratitude at this treat provided for their special pleasure.*

Charity workers provided the Christmas dinner and the decorations, and the "master of the workhouse" organized the children into a program of entertainment, which included the concertina:

*After tea a Christmas hymn composed by an inmate of the workhouse was sung by the children, and a selection of excellently-played tunes was then given by the well-trained band attached to the workhouse . . . The "Leinster Lillies," a clever troupe of amateur Christy Minstrels, . . . won much approval by their quaint gestures and admirable . . . vocal and instrumental selections. A Fantasia of airs played on the concertina well deserved the applause which it received, and indeed every item in the programme was . . . tastefully and cleverly given.*<sup>71</sup>



Figure 16. *A Street Scene in Drogheda, 1880*, by John Cassidy RBS. Oil on canvas, 76 x 56 cm, © Drogheda Municipal Art Collection, Highlanes Gallery, Laurence Street, Drogheda Co. Louth. This is the earliest known depiction of concertina playing in Ireland, and shows a boy in the street playing a concertina. Such street performances were a common occurrence at the time, and attracted the artist's attention.

By 1882 the Salvation Army, founded in England by William Booth, had arrived in Dublin for its work with temperance and poverty, just as it had by this time in the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. William Booth's wife presided at a large meeting in Dublin in June of that year, where:

*One of the detachment present, a son of Mrs. Booth, wore the uniform of the staff, and played a concertina, accompaniment to another "soldier," who wore a most unmartial-looking top-coat over his regimental tunic, upon a cornet. These gentlemen started the hymns, each verse of which, before being sung, was read out by a clergyman who presided at the meeting, and in which nearly the whole of the congregation joined, reading from books sold at one penny each and entitled, "The Salvation Soldier's Song Book." Young Mr. Booth, who, in addition to playing the concertina, sings the hymns, has lungs of leather, but does not produce much music.*

That meeting was broken up by a group of rowdies; it was common elsewhere for "skeleton armies" organized by publicans—whose livelihoods were threatened by temperance—to harry Army activities.

Several of the Booth children played fine Jeffries Anglo-German concertinas (see photographs, Chapters 2 and 9). As in other countries, early Salvationists employed aggressive tactics in their street-evangelism and occasionally found themselves in court, as did Walter O'Neill and Sidney Porter in 1900, who were accused of obstructing a public footway and carriageway at Middle Abbey Street:

*Defendants were holding a meeting in the street and formed a circle round on the thoroughfare. They had a musical instrument, and were singing hymns . . . The Inspector now added that he saw four or five cyclists ride up. When they came near the crowd they had to get off their machines to get past. The people were booing and shouting, and closing in on defendants. Porter, who had a concertina in his hand, flourished it in a way that annoyed the crowd. . . . Captain Porter played a*

*concertina; two respectable girls had to leave the pathway to get past; other persons were obstructed. . . Witness heard Porter say they had done that as a test case.*<sup>2</sup>

These accounts of urban sightings show that the cities of Ireland had German and Anglo-German concertinas in abundance throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century; it was by no means an activity confined to the countryside.

## The Concertina in Traditional Rural Culture

### Background: Irish dance in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the German concertina was, along with the fiddle, a workhorse for music in house and crossroads dancing all over the impoverished Irish countryside—not just in Clare but throughout the country, as in this Mayo crossroads dance of 1904:

#### *Midsummer Eve in Mayo, 1904*

*The scene is the King's highway in the ancient kingdom of Connaught; time, the dusky twilight of midsummer midnight. It is the 23rd of June, the eve of St. John, and the peasants of the "distressful country" are assembling in every village and hamlet to light huge fires and dance around them, as has been their custom from time immemorial . . . The road just here runs through a vast expanse of bog, stretching away on either side to a far-away boundary of blue mountains, hardly to be distinguished now in the faint moonless light of this June midnight. . . .*

*The high-piled bonfire occupies half the road, and fragments are being blown and whirled about by the summer gale in a fashion that seems alarming. Standing about are some thirty or forty men and boys . . . perhaps half that number of girls are crouching under the shelter of the boundary wall farthest from the fire. Their heads are bare, but they have shawls over their shoulders, and all, both men and women, are in everyday working clothes and hobnailed boots. The women in several instances have not even removed their aprons, as if any rearrangement of costume were considered unnecessary. . . .*

*Someone concealed from view is playing lively jig tunes on a concertina, and presently there is a movement in the little crowd; men select partners from among the ladies cowering under the wall, who doff their shawls, and the dance commences. It is formed of some ten or twelve couples; they mark well, with rough-shod feet, the rhythm of*

*the tune on the hard road, and accurately observe intricate steps as they move in and out between other couples and turn their partners around, much in the fashion of a quadrille—all gone through with extreme gravity and decorum, till the dance is accomplished, and the fair sex retire once more into the shelter and obscurity of the wall. There ensues another interval, during which the men stand about as before.*

*The fire is occasionally replenished, and every few minutes the company break into a sort of subdued shouting, apparently for no particular cause; the concertina tunes are continuous, and are the liveliest feature of the gathering. The Celt, like his British neighbour, takes his pleasure sadly, except when his melancholy is dissipated by the spurious gaiety born of strong drink.<sup>3</sup>*

As we saw in Chapter 2 and will see in Chapters 5, 7, and 8, the German and Anglo-German concertinas for a time were the instruments of choice for the new ballroom dances that exploded out of continental Europe in the nineteenth century, so much so that the repertoire of these tunes in each country seems shaped by the peculiarities of the simple, diatonic keyboard of the concertina and one-row button accordion. Those ballroom dances—quadrilles, polkas, mazurkas, waltzes and the like—were not danced just by affluent citydwellers, but by working-class people living in the most remote parts of the earth at the time: farmers, shepherds, graziers, tradesmen, and common laborers.

Impoverished rural western Ireland was at this time a last bastion of Gaelic culture, and one might think that these foreign dances would not be particularly popular there, or that the area might be too remote for such fashionable trends to penetrate deeply. And yet those country folk in a crossroads of rural Mayo were dancing the French quadrille, brought to England and Ireland in the early nineteenth century by returning Napoleonic soldiers, and they were playing it on a relatively new and "modern" instrument imported from Germany. For those not familiar with traditional Irish dancing, the Irish name for the quadrille is "set dancing," or often simply



Figure 17. *The Police Off Duty*, from an illustrated essay entitled "Disturbed Ireland--A Visit to the West" in *The Graphic* (London, Feb. 19, 1887). The drawing depicts an afternoon party, perhaps at a police barracks, in the west of Ireland in 1887. The police and their lady friends are engaged in ballroom dancing--perhaps a polka, from the swing of the dress of the woman at left. Such ballroom dances were all the rage in all parts of Ireland at the time, and the military and police forces were a key element in their dispersal--providing fuel to the ire of Gaelic nationalists, who decried such foreign entertainment. As was the case in most Irish house dances of this time, there is a single concertina player providing the music. With thanks to Nicholas Carolan at the Irish Traditional Music Archive.

"the sets." Given this bit of explanation, the scene at a country crossroad in Mayo was not altogether different from that of Boer dances held in farmers' houses or during wagon treks in the remote African veldt at this time, when German concertinas were played for polkas, waltzes, and quadrilles (Chapter 5). Similarly, during Australian and New Zealand house dances held in the remote "bush," these same dances were performed to the music of German and Anglo-German concertinas (Chapters 7 and 8). Dance culture in the late nineteenth century was nearly as global as is today's popular culture, it seems.

For those not familiar with Irish dance forms and their evolution, the following is a very brief description. Chapter 2 addressed three categories of dancing that were prevalent in England during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; we will use those categories and add a fourth, twentieth-century Irish céilí dancing.

From oldest to youngest:

**Step dances**, danced to jigs, reels, and hornpipes. From Valley's *Companion to Irish Traditional Music*, the step dance is "a precise technical, rhythmic performance genre danced by either male or female, with kinesthetic activity occurring predominantly in leg movements [that] may be performed solo or in a group."<sup>4</sup> This is the dance style known to those audiences who have seen *Riverdance*, for example. Practiced in Ireland for centuries, this dance form is the wellspring for much of Irish traditional dance music.

**Country dance**. This was an English dance form popular in the sixteenth century that was exported both to France and to Ireland. It was typically danced by groups of people organized in long opposing lines (longways dancing) or in circles. In France, variations became known as

*contredanse* and in America, as the *contradance*. In Ireland, the old *rince fada* (long dance) was danced for King James on his arrival at Kinsale in 1689,<sup>5</sup> and that dance was assumed by nineteenth-century Irish scholar Eugene O'Curry to be a fairly modern Irish term for country dance.<sup>6</sup> The form was still somewhat in vogue at the time of the concertina's introduction, at least in eastern Ireland. A dance book belonging to Dundalk, County Louth native Kate Hughes (1853-1938), which she started in 1867, lists 54 country ("contre") dances and a handful of circle dances. These dances were taught by a local dance master named Arch Thomson.<sup>7</sup> It is thought that country dances had faded out by the end of the nineteenth century throughout most of Ireland.

**Ballroom dances.** This term refers to a large group of dances that were imported from the ballrooms of continental Europe throughout the nineteenth century. First to arrive was the quadrille, derived from the French *cotillon*. It came to London ballrooms and soon after to Ireland with Wellington's returning troops in 1814. The quadrille is a partnered dance involving four couples (see p. 133) who executed a series of two to nine *figures* that combined to form a *set*. Individual figures are danced to tunes with rhythms which change from figure to figure; these are usually reels, jigs, polkas, slides, or hornpipes. It is said that dancing masters helped to spread the new dance, and worked to integrate Irish rhythms into the figures.<sup>8</sup> In Ireland these new dances became known as *set dances*; the *Lancers*, *Caledonian*, *Highland*, and *Clare* sets are popular to this day.

A large part of the sets' popularity with the young of all social classes was the fact that the quadrille is a partnered dance (Figure 17). During a set, a young man could swing his sweetheart a fair bit of the time, which was a dramatic innovation relative to the country dance and to earlier Irish step dance forms. The introduction of the quadrille was followed by a new, even-more-sandalous ballroom dance, the waltz, imported in the early nineteenth century. Its close clutch-hold was considered shocking, especially because the entire dance is performed in that position; its

early participants in London were characterized by the press as "loose." Predictably, it swept like wildfire into the English and Irish countryside, and around the world. The waltz was the first of an amazing variety of such *couples* dances to enter British and Irish society from the continent, including the mazurka (ca. 1820s), galop (ca. 1840s), polka (1844), schottische (1850) and varsoviana (1853). Each involved couples in relatively close holds as they performed dances of varying speeds.

Of these couples dances, the waltz and the polka were the most important and lasting in Ireland, although the mazurka, varsoviana, and schottische (often called the Highland, the fling, or the "satoosh") were danced as well. The polka arrived in England in 1844, and in Ireland the very same year, as this 1844 account of a visitor to the Kerry seacoast noted in her journal:

*At the spring-tides here, a very fine cave can be entered from the land at low water, and one night we witnessed a novel soiree dansante in it . . . The outer cave was the selected ball-room, and it was lighted up with torches made of tarred tog-wood stuck into the smooth sand, which threw forth a splendid light, making the shining sides of the caves, which were encrusted with myriads of tiny shell-fish, sparkle with a beautiful effect. The music certainly was not the most select; there was a piper and fiddler and some amateurs who tried alternately the cornet-a-piston and clarinet . . . the music, indifferent as it was, and the merry voices and laughter of the gay dancers, and the murmuring of the billows, echoed by multiplied reverberations, made to my ears a most pleasing harmony. The polka had just been introduced into Kerry, and infinite were the pains taken by a laughing girl to teach the air to the fiddler. "Sure I'd learn it soon enough if I'd the notes," and quite satisfied with himself he played an improvised polka which sounded extremely like an old air the "Rakes of Mallow."<sup>9</sup>*

Quadrilles and polkas were prominently on display at a dance in Swineford (now Swinford), County Mayo, western Ireland in 1865, when an English visitor stopped by the local public house:



*On arriving, my hat was taken at a kind of bar, as if going to a regular party. The company were assembled in the tap-room, which had a sanded floor, and were dancing to the music of bagpipes. The dances were the Irish jig, the reel, polka and quadrille. Refreshments were liberally supplied, consisting of sherry, tea, whisky-punch, soda-water, bread and butter, and biscuits. There was*

*also singing, both sentimental and comic. A stout young man, who handed me some refreshment, apologised for perspiring so much; he had been dancing since five o'clock. I asked him how long they would keep it up. He replied, "Oh! until five o'clock in the morning." . . . I joined in two quadrilles. They were danced much in the English fashion, with this important difference; that in the fifth figure each gentleman had an opportunity of meeting and whirling round and round each lady, so that, according to this practice, a handsome man who happens to secure the prettiest girl in the room for his partner, must at least for a time surrender her up in the last figure to the tender mercies of his fellow-dancers.<sup>10</sup>*

The dance book of Dundalk resident Kate Hughes, mentioned above, contains instructions for eight sets of quadrilles and eight set dances "of quadrille type," including Caledonians, Lancers, mazurka quadrilles, and waltz cotillions. In addition to the 54 country dances mentioned earlier, the dance book only contains instructions for only two reels.<sup>11</sup>

It is not difficult to understand how these "foreign" dances were getting to the heart of Ireland. Beyond the activities at police and army barracks (Figure 17), the dances were being brought by visitors. The observer at the 1844 Kerry polka dance mentioned above was a well-to-do Irishwoman living in London; she appears to have been a relative of statesman Daniel O'Connell, and was on a trip to visit him. She and her party probably brought the new polka fad with them on their visit, as did others. The youth of Kerry were only too happy to learn the latest popular European dance fashions, just as they would be today. Kate Hughes learned them from her local dancing master.

The German concertina was perfect for such house dances, as it was portable, easy to play, and loud enough to be heard at a festive occasion. Such an occasion is shown in Figure 18. This photograph, taken in 1911, shows a group of villagers in the small village of Athea, County Limerick, celebrating the potato harvest. The people in the photograph are still held in the memory of Mrs. Nora Hurley (b. ca 1919) of that town. The harvesters lived in a row of thatched cottages known as "The Lane." Several of them are in the process of making boxty (grated potatoes, mixed with flour and then fried) in this carefully staged photo. The concertina player, May Nan Stevens, played for the dancing that would accompany any such festive gathering. As was the case in the drawing of the police dance of 1887 (Figure 17), the concertina was played solo.

As was mentioned in Chapter 2, it is difficult to overstate the impact of these partners dances (the quadrilles) and especially the couples dances (waltzes and polkas) from continental Europe. They were a global phenomenon affecting people of all ages and all social stations. In an era of global commerce, these dances and the first of their tunes reached far-flung outposts like South Africa, New Zealand, and western Kerry just as soon as they reached London, often with printed texts and music. British military bands introduced both dances and tunes to the cities in their colonies by playing for them in public squares or for the elegant balls given by the aristocracy (see examples in Chapter 5). The passion with which these dances were followed by the young was easily equal to that of the dances of modern times. Rural dances in Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa often lasted throughout the night, breaking up only with the dawn. Nineteenth-century ballroom dances made huge inroads in conservative, Irish-Gaelic society, as set dances, waltzes, and polkas (many of local derivation) quickly became part of what we now term the "traditional" music repertoire. In all of these countries, the last decades of the late nineteenth century formed the peak of the genre.



Figure 18. A group of farmers and villagers from Athea, Co. Limerick, celebrating the potato harvest, 1911. Several are engaged in making boxty for the party, and a concertinist (May Nan Stevens) is present to play music for a dance that would accompany the celebration. With thanks to the National Folklore Collection, University College Dublin, and to Sean O'Dwyer and Nora Hurley.

**Céili dance.** At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Irish nationalist organization The Gaelic League (more on it below) was appalled by the number of “foreign” dances that had infiltrated into Ireland, and it worked to ban outright surviving country dances as well as the ballroom set dances and couples dances. By that time, of course, set dances (quadrilles) and waltzes had permeated deeply into the countryside. At a 1902 first Gaelic League meeting in Curragbeg, County Cork, a priest named Father Fleming “explained the aims and objects of the Gaelic League, and impressed upon them their national duty of reviving Ireland’s ancient language”:

*The meeting concluded with an impromptu ceiliadh. Brian Dempsey had the good luck to bring the fiddle with him: and at Father Fleming’s request he played a selection of local dance tunes. The audience listened in appreciative and respectful silence. But the moment he struck up “The Irish Washerwoman,” several voices called for Johnny Gorman, the sole surviving step-dancer of Curragbeg. Johnny kindly favoured them with the few steps he remembered, and promised to practice the rest by the next evening. The young people stared in wonder and admiration at Johnny’s agility and graceful movements. They had never attempted anything better than the stupid manoeuvres called “sets” and “quadrilles.” Father Fleming contributed to the entertainment by singing the Gaelic League rallying song, “Go Mairidh ár nGaeilg Slán.” In response to repeated entreaties, Mrs. Cuddehly rendered her old favourite ditty, “Carrigdhoun.” All joined in the final chorus, “God Save Ireland.” Then the meeting dispersed in the best of good humour.<sup>12</sup>*

A new group of figure dances taken from County Kerry was eventually adopted by the League, and the ballroom “set” dances fell into disfavor as being un-Irish. These new figure dances—with now-familiar names like *The Walls of Limerick*, *The Siege of Emis*, and *The Waves of Tory*—became the accepted new norm, and céili dancing became a dance phenomenon of the early to middle twentieth century. Many of these

were essentially longways country dances in jig time, and in a sense they revitalized the extinct country dance in Ireland.<sup>13</sup>

Hundreds of céili bands were formed in the years after the Irish Civil War in 1922 up until the 1960s, and often these bands were quite large. At this time the practice of rural house dances was adversely affected and all but ended by the government decree of the Dance Halls Act of 1935, which required a license for the premises of all social dancing. The effect of this legislation was to move dancing from private places (houses and crossroads) to public places. Large céili bands were needed to provide the volume required for the larger public and parish halls (Figure 19), and the old house dances, served by a solo concertina or a fiddle player, became a thing of the past.<sup>14</sup> Some concertina players adapted and prospered; many more did not.

Meanwhile, the young in much of the west of Ireland continued to dance the sets, polkas, and waltzes, foreign or not—and over time, set dances filtered back into many céili dances. With the support of set-dance competitions by the Gaelic Athletic Association and the Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (CCÉ) beginning in the 1970s, as well as through the efforts of many set-dance teachers, the once-foreign but now thoroughly Irish sets have become perhaps the most popular form of Irish dancing today.<sup>15</sup> They are especially popular at the Willie Clancy Summer School in Miltown Malbay, County Clare, and that organization has also done much to revive them. And lastly, polkas—which did not find their way into O’Neill’s 1903 *Music of Ireland*—did find their way into Brendan Breathnach’s *Ceol Rince na hÉireann*, part 2, of 1976.



Figure 19. The Green Isle Céili Band, ca. 1950s. Donnie Connors is seated at right, holding a German concertina. O'Connor was the first president of the Tulla Comhaltas, which was organized in 1957. Céili dances with large céili bands replaced the earlier house dances with solo musicians. Photo courtesy of Tulla Comhaltas.

#### **"Sightings" of the concertina in Irish dancing**

In Drogheda, Co. Louth, in the winter of 1870, a frost of "unusual rigour" set in, freezing the ponds and lakes of the surrounding district. A local gentleman threw open the gates of his "pleasure grounds, in the demesne of Beaulieu, for the exercise and amusement of the inhabitants." Hundreds of townspeople turned out with ice skates:

*The surrounding banks were covered with spectators, who took a lively interest in the animated scene. Several ladies enjoyed themselves on the glassy surface in chairs propelled by gentlemen in skates, and children were wheeled to and fro in perambulators. A section of the assemblage, ensconced in a summer-house, improvised a lively dance during the day, to the music of *concertinas*.<sup>16</sup>*

In 1886 a riot during an attempted house eviction in Woodford, County Galway, resulted, happily, in negotiations for cessation of the disturbance. During the negotiations, the tenant's family sensed victory:

*Constable Denis deposed that while the negotiations for a settlement were proceeding between the sheriff and the tenant, the people inside the house were dancing. There was a *concertina* playing.<sup>17</sup>*

Near the village of Muckcross, County Kerry, in 1930, a crossroads dance that was quite similar to the one described in 1904 Mayo, above, nearly occurred:

*I went there one Sunday night, which is the great dance night, in the hope of seeing a few figs. I found about twelve hulking youths sitting on the stone wall near the platform, but not one girl.*

*The segregation of the sexes is a remarkable feature of the Irish countryside. The girls go about together and the boys loiter in glum groups at street corners or the end of lanes; and both seem a bit sad about it. One of the boys had a fiddle and another had a **concertina**. When I spoke to them they became as shy as colts. The girls, they said, were a bit late for the dance, and if they did not turn up soon they would have to give up the idea of dancing. . . .*

*They noticed, with a brightening of eye and a smoothing of tousled hair, a number of girls coming toward them down the lane. Here were the partners! But the girls walked right past, and the boys just nodded and smiled at them in a sheepish way. No one suggested that they should join the dance. Then a priest cycled past and they all took off their caps. I wondered whether the priest's presence had stopped the dance; but that was not likely, because I have been told that most priests approve of cross-road dancing. The boys cast a miserable glance in the direction of the departing girls, the fiddler put away his instrument, the other musician closed his **concertina**, and sadly the group melted away.<sup>18</sup>*

A 1931 collection of the *Dances of Donegal* includes all ballroom set dances (quadrilles) and couples dances such as the polka. They were collected, as the author indicates, from country dancers and musicians in that northwestern county; the musicians for these dances were reported to have typically played fiddle and concertina.<sup>19</sup>

The above descriptions from Counties Mayo, Meath, Kerry, and Donegal show that the concertina was being widely played for dances throughout Ireland. In the late twentieth century, after the concertina had disappeared in most parts of the country, a number of aging players in Clare left oral histories that contain many references to early-twentieth-century house dances with the instrument. One of those anecdotes came from centenarian Margaret Dooley (b. 1885) of Knockjames, East Clare. She was interviewed by Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin in 1986:

*The young lads long ago, they had no place to go. They had nothing only goin' in there and collectin' in a neighbour's house for a dance. The **concertina**, 'twas in every house and the boys were able to play it as well as the girls. T'ould **concertina** shure! 'Twas easy to learn on it. In the neighbours' houses on the flag floor, they'd be dancin' wild with the nail boots and you'd hear them crackin' a fling before you'd come into the kitchen at all. 'Twas a nice way of putting down the time, but shure! 'tis all different now. Everywhere you'd go that time there was a **concertina** player. There was one nearly in every house.<sup>20</sup>*

Rural people started to see the new but quaint little box as something well suited to the tunes of olden times, which this poem from the 1893 *Cork Southern Star* makes abundantly clear:

# O'B \_\_\_\_'S CONCERTINA

With light caressing touch he lays  
Upon the gleaming keys his fingers,  
And there a moment ere he plays  
With dreamy look he lingers;  
Then plays the "coulin" sweet and low  
With gladness as with sorrow ringing  
And sweet sad mem'ries come and go—  
A brief sweet spell upon us flinging.

And Paddy Mac draws up his chair;  
With wond'ring eyes he listens to it  
And says, when played the plaintive air,  
"Molair! 'Tis he knows how to do it!"  
And when a merry strain he plays  
Old Paddy then you should have seen—ah!  
"God be wid the good ould days—  
Mc sow!! 'Tis grand—that concertina!

"An' whist—no! Is it—tis! Hurroo"—  
What's up with Paddy now I wonder?  
Across the house his caubeen<sup>21</sup> flew,  
Flung his coat the table under;  
Forgotten now his years three score,  
He only thinks of when an airy,  
Jovial bouchal,<sup>22</sup> off he bore  
The crown for dancing in Iveleary.

"Ay! That's the tune---'tis Bonnie Kate!  
"Poor Morty Oge! The pride did lave him  
"Right quick that day when he was bate,"<sup>23</sup>  
"An' here's a taste of what I gave him."  
He danced---oh! Gracefully and light!  
Surprised, delighted, we drew near him---  
Ye gods! But 'twas a gladsome sight;  
We cheered while voice was left to cheer him.

I've read how Arion's music saved  
His life when 'mongst the monsters finny,  
And heard how kings the favour craved  
A tune from peerless Paganini;  
How maids in far Castile can thrill  
With gay guitar or mandolins---ah!  
These could not with rapture fill  
Like you---oh! Magic concertina.

M. O'S.<sup>24</sup>

It seems quite remarkable that the humble concertina, which had been around in significant numbers for only four decades by this time, had been both accepted and honored with a poem for its ability to conjure up the "good auld days" in the eyes of "Old Paddy." Clearly the instrument had carved a niche with players of traditional music and was well on its way to becoming an iconic part of Ireland's musical heritage. In 1908 Ireland participated in the Franco-British Exhibition in west London. A laundry soap magnate provided funds to create the fictional and iconic village of Ballymaclinton (Figure 20) where there was "plenty of amusement to be had on the village green, where the colleens dance to the strains of a concertina played by one of their number, or else to the fiddle and the pipes."<sup>25</sup> When commercial interests take up an instrument to help create an iconic bit of "auld Ireland," surely that instrument was riding the crest of a popularity wave. That popularity, however, was not without challenge from some Irish nationalists.

## The concertina and the Gaelic League

The disappearance of the Irish language, with its attendant damage to the fabric of Gaelic culture, was of paramount concern to many Irish nationalists at the end of the nineteenth century. The Gaelic League was founded in 1893 by Douglas Hyde and Eoin MacNeill. Its goal, as related by historian Donal McCartney, was:

*[T]o keep Irish alive where it was still spoken, and later, to restore Irish as the spoken language of the country. By giving up our native language and customs, said Hyde, we had thrown away the best claim which we had upon the world's recognition of us as a separate nation. Therefore the task facing the present generation of Irishmen was the re-creation of a separate cultural Irish nation, and this could only be done by what Hyde called de-Anglicization—refusing to imitate the English in their language, literature, music, games, dress and ideas.<sup>26</sup>*



Figure 20. Dancers in the fictional town of Ballymaclinton at the Franco-British Exhibition of 1908, where ‘colleens’ danced on the village green to traditional Irish concertina music, for fairgoers. From the author’s collection.

As we have seen above, in the League’s concern for the health of traditional Gaelic culture they attacked the highly popular imported ballroom dances that had permeated both towns and countryside—no matter that these dances were just as “foreign” and imported in England as they were in Ireland. Moreover, from the League’s perspective the imported German concertina was strongly associated with not only those ballroom dances but with English language popular songs, and hence was to be rooted out. In more Anglicized eastern areas like Dublin or, increasingly, in “modern” social venues farther west, popular English music-hall tunes (as well as the latest songs from the American minstrel circuit) might be heard on the concertina. For example, in the Bijou Theatre of Dublin in 1885, the local *Star Minstrel Troupe* performed a “good selection of comic and sentimental songs” that included the usual, stereotypical minstrel jokes about blacks from the southern U.S. entitled “The Black Servant,” songs by Stephen Foster, and banjo and concertina solos by Mr. Killie, which

drew “unceasing applause.”<sup>27</sup>

A nationalist observer had this to say about the German concertina and the equally new and imported banjo in 1894:

*Since the Union, Ireland has shuffled off her ancient language, with its thousand years of history and its striking imaginative literature, with almost indecent haste. She has neglected the priceless treasure of her ancient national music, and her western peasantry sing the music hall songs of London. The Irish harp and the Irish pipes have given way to the banjo and the concertina. The people have even in thousands of cases changed their names, lest any trace of their Celtic nationality should cling to them.*<sup>28</sup>

Gaelic League organizer “Mr. McNestor,” addressing a League meeting in Dublin in 1908, lamented the disappearance of the Irish language and Irish ways:

*They should get back to their native music. They were at one time the most musical nation when a*

*harp hung in every house, but now they had got down to the concertina and melodeon, and even to the mouth organ. They had thrown away the music of their great composers for the abortions and abominations of the English music halls, which if they had any sense at all had an immoral sense that any man would be ashamed of.*<sup>29</sup>

### Ignored by a famous collector

Many of the Gaelic League's views were shared by the premier collector of Irish traditional music of the day, Captain Francis O'Neill, who almost completely ignored the concertina in his extensive writings on Irish music at a time when the concertina was at or near its all-time peak in popularity among musicians in western Ireland. In *Irish Minstrels and Musicians* (1913), for example, he writes of musicians he had met during his years of collecting activities in the United States, as well as those musicians he met when he returned in 1906 to his birthplace of Trillick near Bantry, County Cork, and those he met on an extended collecting trip to County Clare. As we know from indisputable oral history accounts, the concertina was as common as rain in Clare at that time—he might have run into a young Elizabeth Markham (later Mrs. Crotty), or perhaps John Kelly's mother, Chris Droney's father, or Packie Russell's mother—but we read not a mention of concertinas. When O'Neill stayed in Feakle (in eastern Clare, his wife's family home), he should have heard, or at least heard of, concertina player Tadhg Rua McNamara, who was a close friend of Johnny Allen and Paddy McNamara, from whom O'Neill collected music.<sup>30</sup> In all of his voluminous writing on Irish music, O'Neill can only once bring himself to mention that flute player Patrick Fleming of Wexford has a sister who "is a capable performer on the concertina."<sup>31</sup> That, and no more. In his introduction to the reprinted edition of the Captain's 1913 work, Barry O'Neill addressed its implicit bias:

*The titled sketches include 191 Uilleann pipers, 54 fiddlers, 38 harpers, 19 pipemakers, 12 fluters, 10 war pipers, 8 music collectors, one accordion*

*player, and one ceili band. No players of concertina, banjo, or tin whistle are mentioned. These numbers certainly are not intended to reflect the relative sizes of each population. Rather, they show Captain O'Neill's attitude as to which instruments are properly traditional ones.*<sup>32</sup>

Captain O'Neill's disapproval tells us much about the times during which the concertina arrived in western Ireland. He was born in 1849 during the Famine to parents who were both fluent Irish-speakers and accomplished singers of old Irish songs. O'Neill himself, however, was raised speaking only English as a result of the great wave of cultural change taking place at that time, and he never became fluent in Irish. O'Neill left Ireland in 1866, not to return for forty years. When he began his collecting activities in Chicago, he was driven to capture the airs to the songs he remembered his parents singing in his youth. Because the lyrics to the songs were in rapidly disappearing Irish, he rightfully surmised that most of these tunes would disappear along with them. While in Chicago he met scores of émigré Irish pipers at a time when, according to his friend Grattan Flood (*The History of Irish Music*, 1911) there were only a very small number of accomplished pipers left in all of Ireland.<sup>33</sup> Ireland had been emptied of its professional class of traveling pipers by emigration, and part of the musical slack left by the departing pipers was taken up by the populace themselves on the inexpensive German concertina, played for imported polkas and set dances. When O'Neill returned to Ireland in 1906, he would of course have seen this situation in Clare, along with the near disappearance of the Irish language by then, and the attendant erosion of other facets of traditional folk culture. Of music during that visit, he wrote:

*A six week's trip through Munster and Leinster . . . after an absence of forty years, disclosed nothing which afforded much evidence of a musical regeneration. Not a piper or a fiddler was encountered at the five fairs attended, and but one ballad singer. The competitors at the*



*Feis at Cork and at Dublin were amateurs, except one or two fluters. Their very best performers on any instrument at either Feis are easily outclassed (by émigrés) here in Chicago.*<sup>34</sup>

Like his friends in the Gaelic League, of which he was a “keen supporter,”<sup>35</sup> he would have disapproved of many musical changes, including the popular concertina (which had partly filled in the gap left by his beloved pipers) and the banjo, which had slipped into Ireland with the late-nineteenth-century American minstrel shows. Of the tin whistle, he related an incident at a Cork *Feis* in 1906 where some “wonderful” young dancers were to perform on stage:

*With commendable promptness the dancers and the expectant onlookers, many of whom had traveled far to enjoy and encourage the revival of traditional Irish music, were treated to a “tune on the pipes”? No, sad to relate, but on a French celluloid flageolet.*<sup>36</sup>

It is clear that O'Neill found it hard to relate to new instruments that were emerging within Irish music, so much so that he regarded them as things outside the tradition. To the extent that the concertina and other new instruments were played in the absence of pipes and fiddle, they were seen by O'Neill as part of a dearth of traditional music, and as further evidence of the continued collapse following the Great Famine of the old system of patronage of traveling musicians by the gentry. He was not alone. Among works by more recent writers, Ó Canaínn's *Traditional Music in Ireland* (1978) does not mention the concertina, melodeon, or banjo. Only the pipes, fiddle, and harp are treated.<sup>37</sup> O'Neill

may have disapproved of the concertina, but his publications were avidly used by concertina players in Clare. Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin interviewed Paddy Murphy, the late, well-known player from the Connoly/Kilmaley area, who said he learned tunes from local postman Hughdie Doohan, a fiddle player who could read music

and owned O'Neill's *The Dance Music of Ireland*. Said Paddy:

*Hughdie used to sit down like any good schoolmaster with the lamp in front of him on the table. The book would be taken down and Hughdie's fiddle tuned to perfection. He would read the music then from O'Neill's book and according as Hughdie read them we learned them off. He was a mighty man for strange and new tunes. It was from Hughdie that we got Kit O'Mahony's Jig, The Flax in Bloom, The Maid of Feakle, The Northern Lassies and loads more. None of them tunes were ever heard of around here until Hughdie started to read them off of the book.*<sup>38</sup>

Although the evident disapproval of the concertina by the most eminent collector of that era is disappointing, it is perhaps understandable. The concertina was still considered a very modern thing at the turn of the last century, and its use, including for the new ballroom dances for which it was often played, may have been difficult for some to accept. How many persons over a certain age today accept the electric guitar in Irish music, even though it is slowly creeping into the reels played by younger, “Celtic rock” groups? In addition O'Neill no doubt noticed that the old German-made, two-row concertinas lacked the technical capability to play some of the more complex fiddle and pipe tunes, especially in “fiddle” keys like D and A. The influx of significant numbers of higher-quality, three-row Anglo-German instruments seems to have occurred in the mid-twentieth century (see below), much after O'Neill's day. Until those better-quality instruments arrived, concertinas in the west of Ireland were seen by many musicians as a “step down” from the pipes and the fiddle, regardless of their popularity.<sup>39</sup> It well may be that O'Neill was reacting to the German concertina's technical limitations rather than simply its newness.

Regardless of its evident technical shortcomings, the German concertina came into Ireland when traditional music was at a low ebb, after the departure of professional pipers from the

countryside had brought to a close a system where traveling professional experts (often blind) were supported by the largesse of local patrons. When that system collapsed, Irish music had to change in order to survive. In traditional music's next era, the concertina did more than fill in part of the gap left by the emigrating pipers. Being inexpensive and commonly available, easy to maintain, and easy to learn, it was picked up and played by a very large segment of the populace as a whole—not just by a class of traveling professionals. The German concertina, along with the accordion, fiddle, and tin whistle, helped bridge Irish music to a new world, one that O'Neill could not imagine when he said:

*We are told by our optimistic orators and rhymers that Irish music will speedily resume its sway when Irishmen govern Ireland. Let us hope so—but how? When? Where? Who is to teach?*<sup>40</sup>

The people became their own teachers. Cheap, easy-to-learn concertinas and one-row accordions helped that to happen.



Figure 21. Wheatstone two-row wooden-ended concertina, built in 1926, once owned by Michael Mullaly (William Mullaly's brother). The Mullalys were from Milltown, near Mullingar in Co. Meath. With thanks to Bill Mullaly, a descendant of Michael.

## ***A Witness to the Larger Events of the Time***

Concertinas, being commonplace and somewhat ubiquitous during this period, very much reflected the times in which they were played. Hence they were sometimes, by happenstance, on the sidelines during some of the significant events of the day in Ireland. Although the following “sightings” are minor anecdotal references within larger stories, they tell us much about just *how* ubiquitous the instrument was in its heyday and how quickly and thoroughly it was adopted as “their own” by the various social groups that played it—not all of whom fit the current image of traditional players. Ireland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was alive with protest, and the concertina was seen at many such gatherings. An early such account was already mentioned: the arrest of a County Clare protester with a concertina in 1868, one of the earliest sightings of the German concertina in Ireland, where the instrument was already ensconced within the western peasantry:

*At Nenagh (County Tipperary) Petty Sessions on Saturday two performers of street music, who came from the county of Clare, were severely dealt with by the magistrates for playing Fenian tunes on a concertina. It was proved that a crowd which followed them joined in chorus. They pleaded ignorance of the character of the tunes, but the Bench did not accept the excuse, and sent them to gaol for two months.<sup>41</sup>*

### **Evictions and land reform**

A bitter relationship existed between rural Irish tenants and landlords throughout the late nineteenth century, the result in part of cultural memories of the widespread and notorious evictions during the desperate years of the Great Famine. The same decline in agricultural prices that wreaked havoc in rural England (Chapter 2) caused similar problems in Ireland. Added to those woes were widespread crop failures in the fall and winter of 1878-79. Large numbers of Irish tenants faced not only starvation but eviction because of their inability to pay rent.

The ensuing crisis led to the Land War of 1879-1882, where a newly formed Land League led mass protests and boycotts against landlords and evictions. The British Parliament enacted a land act that resulted in a more fair system of rent as well as what was in effect a system of dual ownership of land by peasants and landlords. From that time, the system of landlordism was on the wane. By the turn of the century, as peasants began to purchase their lands with government assistance, Ireland gradually became, for the most part, a nation of landowners. The struggle was a long and drawn-out one, however, and evictions for nonpayment of rent continued throughout the 1880s and 1890s, especially in the “Congested Districts” of the west. Several rural sightings of the concertina are associated with confrontations over eviction.<sup>42</sup>

Clare Island, County Mayo, had been the scene of many dramatic and tragic confrontations between the populace and bailiffs in service of the local landlord. A Congested Districts Board was finally formed to alleviate the problem, resulting in the welcome removal of the landlord and bailiffs and more equitable rents for the tenants:

*The power of England, which for generations suggested nothing to the islanders except gunboats for their eviction and lawyer's letters for their torment, is now represented by . . . the agent of the Congested Districts Board, and by the police who now have no more harmful duty than playing the concertina on summer evenings.<sup>43</sup>*

The image of these policemen transformed to gentle concertina players by local progressive legislation must have been comforting to period readers.

In 1905 a violent protest and riot occurred in the streets of Loughrea, County Galway, following an attempted eviction of a local family by bailiffs on behalf of a particularly unpopular landlord. After the riot many of the instigators were barricaded in a local house; this time the concertina was to be found on the other side of the barricades:

*Early in the afternoon a great public demonstration was held in Church Street in front of Mr. Ward's house, from which several green flags floated serenely on the breeze. The defenders were still there in full force, stripped to the waist, ready for action, and armed with such formidable weapons as reaping hooks and pitchforks, while one brawny fellow proudly brandished a sword stick. From inside came the melodious strains of a **concertina**, while the crowds all around made the welkin ring with lusty cheering.*<sup>115</sup>

In a similar riot that occurred during an attempted 1886 eviction in Woodford, County Galway, the aftermath included negotiations for cessation of the disturbance, and the tenant's family sensed victory:

*Constable Denis deposed that while the negotiations for a settlement were proceeding between the sheriff and the tenant, the people inside the house were dancing. There was a **concertina** playing.*<sup>116</sup>

Such house evictions were not always as dramatic an affair as throwing a destitute widow out into the street. In 1896, an officer of the Sheriff's department had evicted a Mr. Emerson from his home in Skibbereen, County Cork, presumably for non-payment of bills. Immediately afterwards, it was reported that that officer "and his assistant bailiffs had a gay time of it for five days in the house, and during that time a great deal of Mr. Emerson's property was removed." In the court case that ensued, the plaintiff, Mr. Emerson, laid out his evidence of damages to his personal possessions to a skeptical and somewhat hostile court, and described how the:

*bailiffs kept an open house, being drinking, dancing, singing and having music the whole time (courtroom laughter). He believed the house was full of parties every night.*

*His Honor- Where were you all this time?*

*Plaintiff- I was after being evicted, and was walking about.*

*(Defendant's attorney)- Who played the fiddle?*

*Plaintiff- I think it was a **concertina** they had (courtroom laughter).*

*(Defendant's attorney)- I suppose there were a great many young ladies there (laughter)?*

*Plaintiff- I could not say; they would not allow me in at all.*

After cross-examination, in which the defendants sought to show that the plaintiff could not have known who if anyone was playing the concertina, and then demonstrated that a "fair" remuneration had already been paid for the alleged damages to household goods, the case was dismissed by the judge. Whether the unfortunate man was ever returned to his home was not reported.<sup>117</sup>

#### Use in civil disobedience

After experiencing the bitter taste of urban warfare in the 1916 Easter Uprising, where civilian deaths of Dubliners greatly exceeded the combined total of deaths among Irish rebels and British soldiers, an imprisoned Eamonn de Valera urged his fellow Irish rebels to follow a political rather than armed struggle against continued British occupation. The Irish Volunteers became "committed to drilling, parading, defying judicial and military authority, but also to avoiding armed attacks upon soldiers and policemen."<sup>118</sup> Several sightings of the concertina between 1916 and 1917 relate to this policy and to civil disobedience.

In County Clare, 1917, protesters John and Michael Brady were accused by the King's Bench Division of "taking part in exercises or drill of a military nature in contravention of the Defense of the Realm Regulations." In the Clare village of Tuamgraney, the accused and about twenty other men had marched in and out of the village; "one of the men was playing a concertina or a melodeon."<sup>119</sup> This event closely echoes the arrest of two Fenian concertina players from Clare for similar public protest marching at Nenagh nearly fifty years earlier, as was described above.

In 1916, a young Clare man named Michael Brennan, along with his two brothers, engaged in a cheeky and deliberate display of civil disobedience by drilling and protesting directly in front of British authorities. The three brothers were arrested and packed off to Dublin Castle. With the devil-may-care attitude of the young, Brennan wrote home that "we are more or less all right now and although we still have a few grievances left on the whole we are having a good time. . . . We are all together . . . and can sing, whistle, talk, or do anything else we like. The food is good and we have plenty of smoking and reading." Deciding to push for even more, he requested a concertina to while away some of the hours. His request was indignantly refused ("musical instruments are obviously out of place in prison").<sup>120</sup>

Civil disobedience often consisted of subtle acts of resistance by ordinary people, as in the following charming pen portrait of an old street musician and his concertina, written by a sympathetic English visitor to Kilkenny during turbulent times in 1917. The piece was found in a liberal English magazine of the period entitled *English Review*; it contained a philosophical attack on the policies and general stance of British authorities then in charge in Ireland. Of particular musical interest is the "softness" attributed to the old man's playing on an instrument which was not generally known, at the time, for subtlety:

*It was an evening of almost Eastern beauty, and as we sat on the verandah of our hotel, watching the gathering night curiously punctuated by a shaft of light which struck across the tops of a row of houses on the hill like a bar, we could have wished for no more peaceful spot in Europe than the little town of Kilkenny. We had gone there to see a Sinn Féin election, to witness, we were told, a fight, yet all that day we had walked about and found nothing eventful, and, but for the tricolour flag and the usual signs of electioneering activity, it would have baffled even the inventiveness of an Irish military collector of statistics to discover anything sinister or suspicious. Save, perhaps, for one thing—the police. Poses of Irish constabulary stood with*

*their fine straight backs holding, as it were, the strategic points of the town, and they walked in couples, and I could not help wondering why there were so many of them or what it was exactly they were stationed there to do. Otherwise Kilkenny, once a flourishing town of forty thousand, but now reduced by emigration to about eleven thousand, presented no untoward aspect whatever, and I had begun to wonder how I was to pass the time in such calm surroundings till the day of the poll came round, which was to decide whether Cosgrave or the local man was to be "up" (as they say in Ireland).*

*While I was so cogitating there shuffled past us a picturesque figure with a concertina. A man in rags yet with the allure of a poet, his head finely poised, the eyes ardent and mystic, and as he began to play that truly awful instrument with a softness not generally associated with it, we called upon him to give us some Irish airs. He played "The Soldier's Song" and, at the request of an Irishman who had not visited Ireland for thirty years and was feeling sentimental, "The Wearing of the Green" and other melodies, whereat suddenly a couple of policemen appeared before us and ordered him to desist. We protested. We had asked him to play. But authority would hear no excuse. "The man knows he is not allowed to play those tunes," we were told. For a second there was a tension. One or two men standing near groaned; the musician threw up his arms and slunk away; we returned to our coffee disturbed, not understanding, ashamed.*

*I say ashamed deliberately. Was this Ireland? Was this the civilization for which we declare we are fighting in the name of liberty and nationality? A crippled bard not allowed to play Irish national airs on a concertina! This, in the British Empire! We sit in silence. We speak of Parnell. I think somehow of Yeats in a velvet jacket in London drawing-rooms. Ah, how little do we Englishmen know of the truth of Ireland! We go there to hunt; to shoot; to "do" Killarney, the "King's" tour; to amuse ourselves. We do not go there to observe; to think; to realise.*

*My friend cannot understand. "Are we in Russia?" he questions. The whole difference of race looms up before us. This is oppression, stupid oppression.*

*An old man in the street we talk to tells us of the former glory of the city. It is gone. The young men are gone. All round the present town the ruins of Kilkenny's former greatness testify to the decay. Nothing doing. It is the blood-cry of Ireland. All that evening and far into the night we talk of the man with his **concertina** driven away like a hound for playing an Irish tune. It offends us. As I lie in bed that night I cannot help ask myself why it is that Mr. Lloyd George, the Welshman, does not himself go to Ireland and see on the spot this police government, these Cossack conditions, the pity of it. He would be the first man to cry out against this shame. Why does he not go there and talk to the people, see what it all means, and think?"*<sup>121</sup>

### The new republic

Military resistance to British rule returned in the Anglo-Irish War (Irish War of Independence) of 1919-1921. It began largely as a guerilla campaign against police forces and other entrenched British interests in Ireland, but rapidly escalated into a series of bloody attacks and increasingly bloody reprisals in Irish towns and cities. In one such paired occurrence in 1920, the Sinn Féin ambushed a lorry of British soldiers of the Northampton Regiment at Templemore, County Tipperary, killing three:

*The bodies were brought to the barracks, and 40 men determined that there should be revenge. They marched into Templemore, High street, shouting, "Come on lads, give it to 'em!" First a public house was sacked, then another, petrol and incendiary bombs being thrown into the bar. . . . Opposite was a big store. The windows were broken, and the goods looted. Half-drunk soldiers dressed themselves in some of the looted women's clothing and paraded the streets. Others played mandolines and **concertinas** while their comrades danced. . . . The men were utterly out of hand. Even the thought of righteous*

*revenge had vanished after the whisky stores were looted.*<sup>122</sup>

Popular opinion in both America and Britain demanded a truce, which was arranged in 1921. In this agreement the British government ceded dominion over the southern twenty-six counties now known as the Republic of Ireland, while retaining the six counties of Northern Ireland. Following that truce, Civil War broke out among dissatisfied Irish factions. Such civil disturbances were not uncommon during the early days of the Irish Free State:

*There was much disorder last night at the annual Irish gala at Durham in support of the Free State Government. Republicans set up an opposition flag, and men and women engaged in a free fight, in which the Republican banner was torn down. The speakers were interrupted by shouts of "Up De Valera!" and the noise of a bugle blowing. Sticks, umbrellas, and a **concertina** were used as weapons, and a smoke bomb was thrown in the crowd.*<sup>123</sup>

These are all of course isolated and anecdotal incidents, and are recounted without political purpose. They serve to show that the concertina was so completely commonplace and ubiquitous as to be "seen" in all sorts of places where one would not usually encounter a concertina today, and among a much broader political and social spectrum of people than has been the case in later times. A search through Irish papers of the next few decades (1930-1970, prior to the recent resurgence of the concertina's use) has yielded no such similar sightings associated with major national or social causes. These various sightings also make it clear that the German concertina in Ireland was throughout its heyday an instrument of the "common" man, whether a farmer in the Gaelic west, a shipbuilder in Belfast, or a foundry worker in the southeast. Each group who adopted it held it close, and used it unsparingly in occasions such as this gathering on New Year's Eve in Dublin on December 31, 1929, where sentiment and emotion were close to the surface:

From half-past eleven last night onwards, ever thickening streams of people converged on Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin, to let the New Year in. They carried with them every *concertina*, banjo, and mouth organ in the city, and many of them were running, as though they feared to miss something.<sup>124</sup>

### Use in Ulster protests, Orange and Green

The Belfast region had long been at the center of political and social unrest, and concertinas were to be found as part of street protests on both sides of the cultural divide. In Belfast on August 16, 1880, "the streets in the Roman Catholic district were unusually crowded . . . the streets were thronged with people at a very late—or rather, very early—hour, for about half-past twelve o'clock this morning a very noisy crowd of persons (headed by a person playing a concertina) passed up the Antrim road into the notorious locality of New Lodge Road." An additional eight hundred police were eventually called in to quell the disturbance.<sup>125</sup> On the Unionist side, some years later in 1913, an Anti-Home Rule leader named Sir Edward Carson railed in a political speech in Belfast about efforts of the colonial government to limit acts of Unionist protest:

*Why, I read in the paper, with a good deal of disgust, yesterday, that a poor woman had been summoned before the magistrate for sitting at her own door-step, and playing on a concertina the tune, "Boyne Water." Well, I don't want to say anything about those who administer the laws, but I think if I and the rest of us are allowed to go about not only playing the "Boyne Water" on a concertina, but holding great demonstrations of drilled men with banners that bring to mind the great victories of the past, it is a disgraceful administration of the law under those circumstances that forces that poor woman to pay a fine of 40s for playing what they are pleased to call a party tune, but which has brought back reminiscences of the days that have gone before us. For my own part I say this, if they are going to treat us as privileged persons, I*

*say the more privileges they give me the more I despise them.*<sup>126</sup>

For a time concertina music even threatened to replace the booming drum and fife bands of the Orange Order of Belfast's "Twelfth of July" marches, as this 1927 report indicates:

*In a few days the "Twelfth" will be upon us, and the arrangements have been virtually completed for this year's Orange demonstrations. The Belfast procession is expected to prove a record event. . . . Throughout the whole of the province the beating of the drum is heard accompanying the shrill music of the fife, but this instrument of torture is falling into disfavour, its place being taken by really first-rate bands of all descriptions, with the usual tympani. The musical youths of the city have introduced novel combinations, and now it is not unusual to see *concertina*, melodeon and even mouth-organ bands with all the assurance and dignity of regimental musicians. They have the charm of harmony, and are infinitely better than the deafening arrangement of a trio of big drums, with a solitary piper . . . but their disadvantage is that they lack the terror-inspiring effect of the drumming.*<sup>127</sup>

That was a contest the concertina and melodeon were ultimately not to win.

### The concertina in the diaspora

The emigration that had been so heavy during the famine years continued throughout the late nineteenth century in tandem with a greatly depressed rural economy. The consequences on Irish demographics were large and pervasive, as historian R.F. Foster observes:

*By 1870 more than half as many natives of Ireland were living overseas as at home. Three-fifths of the three million emigrants were in the USA, a quarter in Britain, and about one-thirtieth in Australia as in Canada. The unique decline in Ireland's population for nearly a century after the Famine was mainly caused by structural emigration which removed up to half of each generation from the country.*<sup>128</sup>

The local press in countries receiving these immigrants were keen observers of this moving mass of humanity, which yielded some fascinating accounts of early Irish concertina playing.

**United States.** On the steamship *Cedric* in 1904, bound for New York's Ellis Island, an English observer had this to say of the concertina playing (for dancing, and then for more dancing) among the Irish inhabitants of steerage, some of whom are pictured in Figure 22:



Figure 22. Passengers on the steamship *Cedric*, en route to New York. From Winthrop Packard, *The Modern Steerage*, 1904.

*As I became better acquainted with my fellow voyagers I found that most of them were not stupid, ignorant, or unclean in their habits. . . . Very many of the Irish emigrants come well within this category . . . though others from the poverty-stricken bogs of the west were ignorant of the most rudimentary elements of personal cleanliness and behavior. Yet even these certainly possessed youth and high spirits, good nature, warm affections and a concertina to every dozen or so. The deck spaces of the "Cedric" are so huge that even the 1,700 third-*

*class passengers did not crowd them, and ample room was offered for dancing to the music of these concertinas, every one of which on a pleasant day was in pretty steady service. Young and old danced until tired.*<sup>129</sup>

Wherever they landed the Irish took their concertinas and other musical instruments with them, beginning with their temporary lodging in places like New York City in 1891, where "at the boarding houses there [was] considerable sociability, plenty of concertina and flute music."<sup>130</sup> An 1866 Ohio newspaper reported "the case of John Fitzgerald, charged with stealing a concertina from Mary Hawley, valued at \$10," which shows that Irish in America were playing the instrument by that time.<sup>131</sup> The following somewhat lengthy story from the *New York Times* in 1888 is the most substantial account of such concertina playing in the United States, and is written in the stage Irish dialect stereotypically ascribed to Irish immigrants at that time:

#### *Where Ignorance is Bliss*

*Although it is nearly a century since the tune of Croppies Lie Down was sung by Orangemen in Ireland while they massacred the Catholics, it still has the power to incite Irishmen to overt acts. Paddy Ryan plays the concertina. He was born in this city. He had somewhere heard the obnoxious tune but knew nothing of its historical significance. Paddy is a member of an East Side social club. The annual ball of his society occurred a few evenings since. The usual fiddle scrapers were on hand to provide the dance music but Paddy had brought his concertina along, being a little proud of his one accomplishment. During one of the lulls between the dances the president of the association went up to the boss musician and said: "Av ye plaze, sor, I wouldn't be wantin' t' be interfarin' wid your music. Sure, we're all highly plazed wid it, so we are, an' more power t' yer elbow when yer waggin' yer fiddle bow. Faix, ye'll get yer pay whether or no, so ye will, an' its not wan o' us 'ud be takin wan cint off yer bill."*



There he stopped to take a breath and the German professor looked down at him from the platform in an enquiring way.

"Vot you will haf, mine frent? Beer, ha?"

'Go smother yersel', ye cheese-headed Dutchman. I can buy me own beer, so I can, an small fear t' me. I want ye t' stop squ'akin' th' fiddles an' rattlin' th' brass till Paddy Ryan plays an Irish chune on his *concertina*. Now, d'ye understand that, ye ould beer barrel'?"

"Yah, yah, das is all recht. Stop de moosic."

The music was stopped and the president shouted: "Will Paddy Ryan come up [to] the platform an' play an Irish chune fer the b'ys an' gur-rls?"

Paddy came bashfully forth, his face suffused with blushes and his beloved *concertina* under his arm.

"Play the Rakes o' Mallow," shouted a voice.

The rollicking air set everybody's feet to itching. This was followed by *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*, *The Cat in the Corner*, and *The Limerick Races*. All these were rapturously received. Paddy was encouraged. He glowed with pride. Pulling his forelock apologetically, he stood up and said:

"Av the ladies an' gintlemin plaze, I'll play a new chune I'm after larnin' the other day."

Of course the audience was pleased, and every ear was open to catch the air. Paddy pulled the lively measures out of his instrument with eagerness. He had hardly played two bars, however, when the listeners turned and looked at each other with surprise and indignation. Then twenty roysterers arose as one man and made a rush for the luckless player. They seized him from behind and before. They kicked his *concertina* into the middle of the floor, where the girls made a football of it. They tore his store clothes from his back and bruised his cheeks with their hard fists. Those who could not get at him shook their

fists in his direction and swore terrible oaths. Impelled by a stogy boot, poor Paddy shot out the door, followed by the howling mob. As he rolled down the staircase and out on the sidewalk, a friend picked him up and hurried him around the corner into a saloon. Bleeding, bruised, and almost naked, Paddy stammered:

"Shure, w-w-w-hats th' matter, Jim?"

"Ah, ye ould fule, weren't ye playin' Croppies Lie Down?"<sup>132</sup>

Regardless of the explosive reaction to poor Paddy's tune, such performances of jigs and reels made stringent demands on the players of these inexpensive Anglo-German concertinas, and there is early evidence that Irish immigrants, as they became more prosperous, traded up to more expensive Lachenal, Jeffries, and Wheatstone instruments. An 1880 crime report in a Philadelphia newspaper noted that "George Lieb stole a concertina worth \$80 from a house in which John O'Neill resided; (Lieb, the burglar) sold it for \$1.50."<sup>133</sup> A concertina of that value would clearly have been an English-made one. More than a century later, today's Irish players are still vying to purchase top-of-the-line vintage instruments.

In 1894 in Brooklyn, New York, recent immigrants who were "pianists, violinists, flutists, and concertina players," formed a Union of Irish Musicians. Its object was "to revive and preserve Irish music," and its members banded together for appearances at local venues. Interestingly, "Mr. James Rochford reported that he found it difficult to secure bagpipers unless they were assured of receiving payment for their services," whereupon the organization considered blackballing the pipers for performances in local picnics and balls.<sup>134</sup> Several observers, notably Tony Engle and Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, have marked that the playing of concertinas in Clare filled the gap left by the emigration of most of the old class of traveling professional pipers during the Famine and later years. It is consistent with such stories of the pipers' departure that these immigrant pipers in Brooklyn considered

themselves professionals and above playing for free.

William Mullaly, a native of County Westmeath who came to the United States in 1910, is perhaps the best known of the immigrant concertina players in America today. His Columbia and Victor phonograph recordings made from 1926 to 1927 in Camden, New Jersey, are the earliest known recordings of Irish music (and perhaps any type of music) played on the Anglo-German concertina.<sup>135</sup> (Dublin resident and English-system concertina player Billy Roberts recorded "Kerry and Clare Jigs and Reels" for "Parlophone—the Record that Studies the Irish" two years later, in 1929.)<sup>136</sup> Other immigrant concertina players joined vaudeville. J. D. Kelly "in his imitations of various familiar sounds from the farm yard and camp on concertina and violin, won deserved applause" at the Park Theatre in New York City in 1876;<sup>137</sup> and a troupe visiting Omaha, Nebraska in 1899 contained, in addition to the dancing Connolly sisters, the well-received Reagan Trio: "They have secured many a hit and earned a great deal of applause during their stay here. Their musical comedy act, introducing singing and dancing with concertina, banjo, and guitar accompaniment, will be the feature of the program" at Wirth's vaudeville palace.<sup>138</sup>

**Australia.** In a 1946 issue of the *Irish Independent*, an old Irish woman recalled the journey she had made in her youth on an emigrant ship bound for Australia:

*Even now as I write, it takes but little mental effort to conjure up the scene on the afterdeck. A bearded man playing a wheezing, asthmatic concertina . . . a young tired-eye woman, her jet-black hair hanging down her back . . . washing clothes in a bucket . . . children shrieking as they played about the scuppers . . . old men and women gasping for breath beneath the canvas awnings protecting them from the merciless August sunshine of the Red Sea.*<sup>139</sup>

In Australia as in the United States, arriving immigrants joined a population that was already

playing the concertina, and they soon joined in with local dance music. A 1911 poem by E.J. Brady (1869-1952) highlights a harvest dance at an Irishman's farm; here are the first two verses:

Daly's Threshing

It was threshing over at Daly's,  
and the bearded bushmen rode,  
Over Mountain gorge and gully,  
where the creeks, clear-watered, flowed:  
From the slopes, and through the ranges,  
past the broad'ning river beds,  
Round the spurs and o'er the flat-lands  
came the host of Daly's friends;  
Came to reap the yellow harvest,  
waving in the summer sun;  
Came to dance with Daly's daughter  
'neath the moon when day was done.

As the long day's labor ended,  
and the horses munched their feed,  
Far was borne upon the breezes  
faint aroma of the "weed,"  
Sounds of song and year-old waltzes,  
new enough for rustic feet,  
When the honest hearts above them  
with the joy of living beat.  
On the hard earth floor together,  
youth and maiden, flushed and gay,  
To the gasping **concertina**  
danced those charmed hours away.<sup>140</sup>

The Irish took great pleasure in joining in such social dances, and even in helping to orchestrate them, as did Constable Casey in the following amusing verse from Sydney in 1900. As was common at the time in both Ireland and Australia, the music was provided by a solo concertina:

Constable Casey, M.C.

Oh, the constable would stand,  
He would stand.  
And, with the voice of gruff command,  
He'd say, "Grip your partners! Bow!  
Shassy now! Shassy now!  
Be aisy, Michael Moore--  
Cock-eye Simpson has the flure;  
And Paddy Byrne, me mahn,  
Be as dacint as ye can."  
And the *concertina* then  
Would play "Courtin' in the Glen;"  
And the dance would gaily go  
On a square and proper toe,  
And regulated be  
By Casey, M.C.

Oh, the constable would say,  
He would say,  
To all the wall flowers in array  
By the greasy dadoed wall —  
"Choose your partners, one and all,  
And if any mahn ye see  
Should object to dance wid ye  
Why, just pint him out to me —  
And in quod he soon will be.  
So get up and curchey now,  
But beware of any row.  
Swing your partners, gentlemint!  
Now it's hand-in-hand agin —  
"That's the way things should be  
Under Casey, M.C.

' Gyirls, yer programmes, if ye plaze,  
If ye plaze.  
Ha ! These names ye must erase,  
Ye must sthroike out Billy Wood —  
For his morals are not good.  
Ye must sthroike out Mike Dinoo—  
He'll be Wanted purty soon.  
Ye must sthroike out Andy Greer—  
He's a married man, I hear.  
Ye must sthroike out all the lot,  
For religions doves they're not.  
What for partners will you do?  
Then, says ye,  
Why, God bless yer hearts so throe,  
And yer heels wid their tattoo,  
Me fri'nd Constable M'Glue  
Will at yer service be,  
Wid Casey, M.C.

—C.B., in the *Sydney Bulletin*.<sup>141</sup>

**England.** England received a large number of nineteenth-century Irish immigrants, some of whom played concertina. In the late twentieth century the late Tommy McCarthy played concertina in London in a circle of musical émigrés that included the legendary musicians Willie Clancy, Séamus Ennis, and Bobby Casey, among others. Nearly a century earlier, however, a once-prominent Irish composer and concertina player named Tom Maguire was far less fortunate in his friends. During his prime, Maguire had written a large number of songs of the sentimental and comic Irish varieties, predominantly for the music halls. The sad tale of his older years is told in this story from a 1907 newspaper's column on London court cases:

#### *Composer's Sad Plight*

*The spectacle of a popular song writer fallen upon evil days produced a pathetic impression at Bow street Police Court yesterday afternoon. A blind composer, Tom Maguire, was, with his wife Frances, charged with causing an obstruction. He was well known years ago, and he has written many songs which have secured a great deal of popularity, including these sentimental ballads, Spare the Old Mud Cabin, Kathleen Asthore, Wait Till the Clouds Roll By, and others with a humorous note, but poverty and affliction overtook him, and now, absolutely blind and nearly stone deaf, he lives in Clerkenwell, and goes into the streets trying to sell his melodies. Mrs. Maguire, a neatly-dressed little woman in black, had to lead her husband carefully into the dock. A zealous constable on the previous evening saw Maguire playing a *concertina* on the pavement in Russell street. He stopped this, but later Maguire and his wife were on the pavement again selling song books. They were arrested. A number of songs were handed to the magistrate, Sir Albert De Rutzen, which Maguire proudly acknowledged having written twenty years ago. "I was very famous then," he added, "but now I'm in the gutter." He further stated that if he only had a decent instrument he could probably get his living on the music halls.*

Maguire and his wife were discharged, and the old composer was led gently out of court.<sup>142</sup>

This story was carried in several American papers at that time, doubtlessly because of the popularity of his work. "Wait Till the Clouds Roll By," from a British broadside sheet of that period, is shown in Figure 23.<sup>143</sup> Another of his sentimental songs was "Don't Burn the Cabin Down," an 1894 tear-jerker that dealt with eviction in Ireland. Its chorus was:

Don't burn the cabin down, mother is willing to pay.  
Father is now on the ocean, fishing for us far away;  
Remember it is Christmas eve, and snow is falling too.  
Don't burn the cabin down, and I will pray for you !

Some of his songs have since been absorbed into the folk lexicon and have turned up in collections of "traditional" southern American song, for example. His appears to be a story similar to Stephen Foster's in that Maguire sold dozens of tunes that became hits on the London and worldwide stage—tunes that were said to have made the fortunes of many a music hall performer while the composer received almost nothing for them. A 1907 Salt Lake City Herald article clarified his biography and his importance in the world of popular song. It was reported there that:

*His concertina is cracked and the music is wretched, but the devoted wife can see no blemish. "If he only had a new concertina," she said in court, "Tom could get a 'turn' at one of the music halls. He plays just lovely."*<sup>144</sup>

## WAIT TILL THE CLOUDS ROLL BY.

Jenny, my own true loved one,  
I'm going far from thee,  
Out on the bounding billows,  
Out on the dark blue sea.  
How I will miss you, my darling,  
There when the storm is raging high,  
Jenny, my own true loved one,  
Wait till the clouds roll by.

CHORUS—

Wait till the clouds roll by, Jenny,  
Wait till the clouds roll by;  
Jenny, my own true loved one,  
Wait till the clouds roll by.

Jenny, when far from thee, love,  
I'm on the ocean deep,  
Will you then dream of me, love,  
Will you your promise keep?  
Soon will I come to you, my darling,  
Take courage, dear, and never sigh,  
Gladness will follow sorrow,  
Wait till the clouds roll by.

Jenny, I'll keep your image  
Within my heart so true;  
Each thought of mine forever  
Still, love, shall be of you.  
Dry, then, your tear-drop, my darling,  
Soon will the night of sorrow fly;  
Jenny, now don't be lonely,  
Wait till the clouds roll by.

Figure 23. *Wait Till the Clouds Roll By*: a period broadside, of one of many hit music hall songs written by concertina player Tom Maguire.

## Heyday, Decline, and Survival

### The concertina in everyday life

During its heyday—the peak of which comprised the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth—the concertina was seen everywhere in Ireland: in holiday excursions, in parties, in domestic spats, and in petty criminal cases. The abundance of documented appearances in scenes of everyday life demonstrates its widespread popularity.

In an 1893 boating disaster on the Shannon River near Ballybunion, County Kerry, a group of seventeen pleasure boaters had been out in a hired boat for the afternoon to cross the Shannon estuary between Ballybunion and the Clare coastline a few miles south of Kilkee:

*[T]he water being smooth, Murphy and his friends had no hesitation in starting for home across the river. . . . They had enjoyed themselves during the day, but were all sober, two of the party playing on violins and a third on a concertina. They were remonstrated with as to the risk they incurred, but made light of any danger, and so they rowed away on their fateful passage.*

*The boat drifted out to sea, and all were drowned, save Murphy, a local farmer who had hired out the boat.*<sup>145</sup>

In Kilmessan, County Meath, a constable standing guard at a local 1905 election “whiled away with concertina selections the long intervals of inactivity in the polling booth.”<sup>146</sup> In a ghostly Snap-Apple (Hallowe’en) party in County Meath, “Katy Walsh could make a corpse dance with the concertina.”<sup>147</sup> Speaking of corpses, at a wake in Waterford in 1880, police “entered a house where a party of young people—eight in number—were waltzing round the room to the music of a concertina, which was being played by a man who sat beside the coffin.” All were quite drunk.<sup>148</sup>

In Clonakilty, County Cork, an area that was rapidly changing to English speech, the local football club held a fund-raising concert at the

town hall for a large audience in 1892. Among songs, instrumental duets, and comic pieces, Kate Kearney played a “valse” as a concertina solo. The evening’s entertainment included many popular and sentimental songs and light classical pieces, but no mention of any reels, jigs, or traditional dance.<sup>149</sup>

In an internationally reported incident that occurred in 1905, a woman in Ballinasloe, County Galway sought to have her husband committed to an asylum after he attempted to “emulate the performance of Pan, the mythological god, with his flute” by serenading his cattle with a borrowed concertina:

*The attempts consisted of going out in the field with a concertina—which he had borrowed—and playing the dulcet tones to his bullocks, after inviting some neighbors to see them dance. The bullocks did not dance, and the assistant medical officer of Ballinasloe Asylum hinted that all [his] “goings on” were actuated by the belief that the wife was engaged in a conspiracy against him, and had put him in an asylum in order to enjoy his property, which was considerable.*<sup>150</sup>

In the days of the Irish Free State, an official of the Waterguard (the Customs agents), while discussing the wily smugglers they had been encountering, described an innovative means by which to transport contraband:

*An officer once told me that the most ingenious smuggler he had ever heard about was a tough old salt who always carried his concertina ashore after each voyage. One day an officer asked him to play a sailor’s hornpipe. He refused. The officer then said he would play it. But the concertina was unworkable because it was filled with choice cigars.*<sup>151</sup>

Concertinas appeared in public houses, too, and were not always greeted with approval. In a public hearing discussing an application for a license for a Bantry, County Cork, pub in 1896, an objection was raised by a Mr. Sheehan against the license sought by a client of Mr. Powell:

*Mr. Powell asked what parishioner Mr. Sheehan represented.*

*Mr. Sheehan said he represented Mr. Jonas Wolfe, solicitor.*

*His Honor- Why is not Mr. Wolfe here?*

*Mr. Powell- I am sorry to say that he is indisposed. If he had stirred himself up with a little whiskey he might have been possibly here (laughter). I believe that Mr. Wolfe's objection is to music of the **concertina** kind; it is not classical enough for him (laughter).*

After more discussion the judge granted the applicant a license for the fiftieth public house in the small town of Bantry.<sup>152</sup>

Not all such complaints involving concertinas involved public houses and alcohol, however. In Navan, County Meath, in 1899, a complaint was lodged against Miss Julia Young, "who has James Reilly annoyed with a concertina. . . . He is a night man, two scores of years. He can't sleep with the noise of Julia Young. Yours truly, Bridgit Reilly."<sup>153</sup>

A correspondent to the *Southern Star* in 1911 opined that "In deft hands, the concertina is, I think, the most deadly instrument."<sup>154</sup> That same year, in Clonakilty, County Cork, a woman charged that "she has been continually annoyed, abused and insulted by T\_\_\_ and family. They play an old concertina to annoy her, and call her . . . names."<sup>155</sup> That might seem amusing, except that a two-way feud developed that ended up by the plaintiff having her head smashed with a shovel, requiring a lengthy hospital stay—deadly indeed. In another such domestic dispute, an Avondale (near Castleblaney in County Monaghan) butter merchant was sued in 1891 by another Avondale man for "alleged misconduct with the plaintiff's wife." Two men had been visiting at the plaintiff's house one afternoon while said plaintiff was away in America; one man danced with the absent man's wife while another played the concertina. A zealous neighbor had seen all of this through an open window and the court case was a result.<sup>156</sup>

Not all protest was political in nature. As a

result of a 1911 lockout in the Wexford foundries, County Wexford, a violent protest ensued. At the start of the fray, "led by a man playing a concertina, the men paraded the streets, cheering and booing." Later in the evening, the unruly protestors broke several windows and burned the foundry foreman in effigy.<sup>157</sup>

Other incidents reflect the popularity of the instrument with youth (sometimes mischief-makers), as in this case from County Clare in 1928:

*The potent attraction exercised by a pot of jam and a **concertina** resulted in three young boys being charged with housebreaking. The three boys are from the Lisheen district and they appeared before District Judge Gleeson in the Children's Court at Ennis on Friday. The superintendent, who prosecuted, suggested that the most serious part of the charge was the language in which it was couched. He explained that the boys had been attracted by the jam and the **concertina** and had entered the house by a window to create great "ruck" as they themselves admitted. They had eaten the jam, played the **concertina**, and then made their exit again through the window. The "ruckers" were discharged with a caution after being reminded of the rights of property by the Justice.*<sup>158</sup>

### A nationwide distribution in its heyday

Although the concertina is thought of as a predominantly Clare instrument in Ireland today, such was not the case during the instrument's heyday, as has been shown above. At that time its use was not restricted to "traditional" music, and it was played by other parts of the citizenry with tastes that stretched to Anglo-American and European popular songs. Very likely there were concertinas in every county in the country. The areas with gray shading shown on the map in Figure 24 illustrate the positions of counties with documented concertina use in Ireland during the period between 1850 and 1930, as researched for this study. It should be noted that this research was carried out in 2007 and 2008 using digitally accessible archives which at the time were available only for newspapers in a relatively few

areas, principally Dublin, Belfast, Meath, and Cork. For this reason, certain areas are decidedly under-represented. Inasmuch as some of the Dublin newspapers sought a national clientele, there are "sightings" noted outside that city, but coverage is spotty. For all these failings, the map shows a broad distribution, and indicates that distribution of instruments during the concertina's heyday was very probably nationwide.

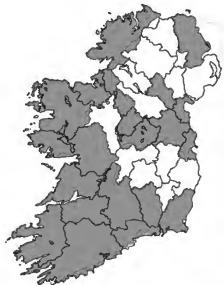


Figure 24. Counties of Ireland with documented 'sightings' in this report of the German or Anglo-German concertina during its heyday, 1850-1930. Counties with 'sightings' are shaded gray.

The vast majority of players who were active during the concertina's heyday are long forgotten. They played the instrument, as do most of us today, as a pleasant pastime and lived lives that were perhaps unexceptional in most regards—most of them successfully keeping their lives out of the newspapers. Thus no one but a family member might now remember that a grandmother or grandfather played a concertina. On a nationwide level very few have descendants who play today because of the decline in use of the instrument. Nonetheless, one way to roughly

gauge the extent of these former players is to assemble a list of people, both living or who lived in the recent past, with ties of one sort or another to Irish music, and mark those who had an ancestor, family member, or tutor who played the concertina during its heyday (1870-1930).

The following list (Table 1) was obtained by making a digital search of Fintan Vallely's *Companion to Irish Traditional Music* (1999) as well as of other sources. Each entry in the list shows a person, their birthplace or domicile, along with each known ancestor, family member, or musical influence who played concertina during the instrument's heyday. It is not intended to be exhaustive, scientific, or encyclopedic; but the results are intriguing because the reach of those who played during the heyday is large. Due to the great number of Clare musicians appearing in Vallely's *Companion*, the list is top-heavy towards Clare in its representation of former concertina players. Not surprisingly, however, there are a fair number of non-Clare concertina ancestors included, from Counties Donegal, Leitrim, Tipperary, Westmeath, Cork, Limerick, Kerry, Louth, Galway, Sligo, and Dublin. These ancestor sightings have been incorporated into Figure 24. Anecdotal information supports the finding that former players had a nationwide distribution. Noel Hill, the most prominent of modern players of the instrument, has said that throughout the years of his many concert appearances, various people from the audience or workshops have mentioned to him that a grandparent had played the concertina; he reports that these people came from locations throughout Ireland.<sup>159</sup>

Table 1. List of selected persons with connections to Irish music who reportedly are either descended from or were significantly influenced by people who played the concertina during the period 1870-1930. These concertina "forebears" are shown beneath each listing, in italics.

**Mary Ann Carolan** (1902-1985): singer, concertina, Drogheda, Co. Louth (Figure 23)

*Father, Pat Usher*

**Willie Clancy** (1918-1973): uilleann pipes, Miltown Malbay, Co. Clare,

*Father, Gilbert Clancy, Islandbawn, Co. Clare*

*Mother, Ellen Killeen, Emmistymon, Co. Clare*

**Eamonn Cotter**: flute; Kilmaley, Co. Clare

*Two maternal aunts from Kilmihil, Co. Clare*

**Martin (Junior) Crehan** (1908-1998): fiddle, concertina, Mullagh, Co. Clare

*Mother, "Baby" Crehan (b. ca 1876)*

**Elizabeth Crotty** (1885-1960): concertina, Gower, near Cooraclare, Co. Clare

*Older sister*

**Jackie Daly**: accordion and concertina, Kanturk, Co. Cork

*Influence, Johnny Mickey Barry, Sliabh Luachra, Co. Kerry*

**Micheal and Triona Ni Dhomhnaill**: guitar and clavinet, Ballymote, Co. Sligo

*Grandmother, Co. Sligo*

**Chris Droney**: concertina, Bellharbour, Co. Clare

*Father, Jim; grandfather, Michael*

**Kitty Hayes** (1926-2008): concertina, Fahanlunaghta, near Lahinch, Co. Clare

*Father, Peter Smith*

**Martin Hayes**: fiddle, Feakle, Co. Clare

*Grandmother*

*Tutor John Naughton, Feakle*

**Noel Hill**: concertina, Caherea, Co. Clare

*Both parents; grandparents; grandaunts and granduncles*

*Tutors: Paddy Murphy, Connoly, Co. Clare; uncle Paddy Hill*

**James Kelly**: fiddle, Dublin

*Father, John Kelly (1912-1989)*

**John Kelly** (1912-1989): fiddle and concertina, Rehy, Co. Clare and Dublin

*Mother Eliza Kelly, uncle Tom Kelly, Co. Clare*

*Tutor Mary Houlihan, Kilballyowen, Co. Clare*

**P. J. Lynch**: fiddle, Co. Clare

*Aunt Brigid McGrath (1880-d.?), Clogher, Co. Clare (Kilfenora céilí band, 1920s)*

**Tommy McCarthy** (1939-2002): uilleann pipes and concertina, Kilmihil, Co. Clare

*Mother*

*Influenced by Solas Lillis, Co. Clare*

**Jacqueline McCarthy**: concertina, b. London, now Co. Galway

*Father Tommy McCarthy (1939-2002); paternal grandmother*

**Josie McDermott** (1925-1992): flute, Colmeen, Co. Sligo

*Mother*

**Tommy McMahon**: concertina, Cooraclare, Co. Clare

*Influence, Bernard O'Sullivan (b.?-2007) Cooraclare, Co. Clare*

**Mary McNamara**: concertina, Tulla, Co. Clare

*Father*

*Tutor, Mickey Donoghue, Tulla, Co. Clare (Figure 22)*



- Mairead Ni Mhaonaigh:** fiddle, Gweedore, Co. Donegal  
*Mother, paternal grandmother*
- William Mullaly** (1884-1955): concertina, Rathconrath, Co. Westmeath  
*Tutor Mrs Heydune, Painstown, Co. Westmeath*
- Tom Mulligan** (1915-1984): uilleann pipes, fiddle; Bornacoola, Co. Leitrim  
*Grandfather, Co. Leitrim*
- Paddy Murphy** (1913-1992), Bealcragga, Fiach Roe, Co. Clare  
*Uncles: John and Martin Meehan, Inagh, Co. Clare*
- Sonny Murray:** concertina, Ennis, Co. Clare  
*Tutor Mick "Stack" Ryan, Leitrim near Cree, Co. Clare*
- Paddy O'Brien** (1922-1991): accordion, Newtown, Co. Tipperary  
*Grandfather Pat, uncles Paddy and Mick*
- Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin:** concertina, Co. Clare  
*Grandmother Nora Coughlan, Kilmaley, Co. Clare*  
*Tutor Paddy Murphy, Connoly, Co. Clare*
- Sean O'Dwyer:** concertina, Dublin  
*Mother Ellen O'Dwyer, Limerick*
- Padraig O'Keefe** (1887-1963): fiddle, Castleisland, Co. Kerry  
*Mother Margaret O'Callaghan, Kiskeam, Co. Cork*
- Peadar O'Loughlin:** flute, fiddle; Kilmaley, Co. Clare  
*Father Mickey O'Loughlin*
- Seán Ó Riada** (1931-1971): composer, Adare, Co. Limerick  
*Mother*
- Bernard O'Sullivan** (b.?-2007): concertina, Cooraclare, Co. Clare  
*Mother*  
*Influence Mick "Stack" Ryan, Leitrim near Cree, Co. Clare*
- Willie Reynolds** (1916 - ): uilleann pipes, Athlone, Co. Westmeath  
*Father*
- Micho Russell** (1915-1994): flute, tin whistle; Doolin, Co. Clare
- Packie Russell** (1920-1977): concertina, Doolin, Co. Clare  
*Mother Annie Moloney; aunt*  
*Influences Patrick Flanagan, Jack Donoghue*
- Sharon Shannon:** accordion, Ruan, Co. Clare  
*Grandparents*
- Paddy Taylor** (1914-1976): flute, Loughill, Co. Limerick  
*Mother, Honora*
- Rena Traynor** (1955-1995): concertina, Co. Clare  
*Relative of Mrs. Crotty*
- Michel Tubridy:** flute, whistle, concertina, Kilrush, Co. Clare  
*Mother*
- John Williams:** concertina, Chicago, Illinois  
*Father, grandfather, Doolin, Co. Clare*
- Dan Worrall:** concertina enthusiast, Houston, Texas  
*Grandmother Theresa Hanrahan Doyle, Inagh Co. Clare*  
*Granduncle Michael Doyle, Ballymakea, Mullagh, Co. Clare*



Figure 25. Mickey O'Donoghue (left, with German concertina) and Martin Rochford (uilleann pipes) making music. County Clare, ca. early 1960s. O'Donoghue was an early influence on the music of Tulla concertina player Mary MacNamara. Photo courtesy of the Tulla Comhaltas.

Much has been written about the fact that women were frequent players of the instrument; some have said that women were in fact the predominant players in those past times.<sup>160</sup> In the early decades of the twentieth century, factors in favor of women's use of the concertina in Clare included their growing financial position due to domestic industries stimulated by schemes of the Congested Districts Board;<sup>161</sup> the low cost of concertinas (a woman might thus be able to make the purchase without the involvement of her husband); and the relative newness of the instrument, hence no long-standing "tradition" of male dominance among players, as there was in piping. Ó hAllmhuráin reports that the concertina was often referred to as the *bean chairdeán* (female accordion), although a count he made of known concertina players in Clare, living and deceased, who lived during the period 1900-1990 showed that only 35 percent were women (one hundred forty-seven women versus two hundred sixty-nine

men).<sup>162</sup> A count of male versus female players in Ireland during the "heyday," as noted in the newspapers and other documents accessed during the preparation of this book, yields a four-to-one frequency of males to female players and owners. Among the list of "forebear" players in Table 1, however, the numbers are approximately even at thirty-four to thirty-two. The much larger ratio in the newspaper accounts is understandable, in that women in those days were more likely to be found at home than involved in the sort of activities that would land one in the newspapers. The one-to-one ratio of "ancestor" players in Table 1 is perhaps more representative of the relative numbers of men versus women players at that time, and reflects a remarkable proportion of women players in an era when public playing of pipes or flutes by women was "just not done." As the late player Tommy McCarthy said of his hometown of Sheane, near Cooraclare:

*'T was very much a woman's affair too. Of course women used to be indoors a lot in those days. They use'dn't to go to pubs and all that. The husband used to be out of course in those days. The woman used to be always inside looking after the children, baking bread or something and they had t'ould concertina and they'd be playing away. Around Sheane alone . . . every woman used to play one nearly. There was a Mrs. O'Brian and my mother. Mrs. Crotty wasn't far away in Gower.'*<sup>163</sup>

When musical competitions began at the Fleadhanna Cheoil in County Clare in the 1950s, women's reluctance to play outside the home still continued. Michael Tubridy observed the following:

Miltown Malbay, 1957: 1 woman out of 22 competitors  
Tulla, 1958: no women out of 10 competitors.  
Lisdoonvarna, 1959: no women out of 12 competitors  
Kilrush, 1960: one woman out of 13 competitors.  
Kilfenora, 1989: 17 women out of 24 competitors.<sup>164</sup>

By the 1989 Fleadh in Kilfenora, times had changed. The concertina continues to attract a large following among women; Noel Hill, for example, notes a large majority of girls and women in his classes in Ireland. When asked why they prefer the concertina, they typically respond that it is small, easily portable, and has a reedy tone that "sounds like the pipes."<sup>165</sup>

Although it may seem difficult to understand today, there are many reasons for the Anglo-German concertina's early broad-based popularity among men and women—not just in Ireland but in England, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, the United States, and many other parts of the western world. Excepting mouth harmonicas and Jews' harps, these little boxes were (along with melodeons) the first inexpensive, mass-produced consumer musical items, pre-dating the public's future love affairs with guitars, ukuleles, and mass-produced pianos. In a world lacking electric lights, radios, televisions, and recorded music, the concertina gave people a way in which to entertain themselves during long, dark, and quiet winter evenings; and it was easy to learn for those with no formal music training. It allowed persons

with very modest means to make music, thus forgoing more expensive (and handmade) fiddles and bagpipes. It helped one host house dances, which were perhaps the main social gatherings of the time after church attendance. It came in a neat bundle of shiny wood, painted cardboard, and varnished buttons, and made reasonably nice noise—such shop-bought finery at a low price! It is no wonder that the Anglo-German concertina became a global phenomenon. In a nineteenth-century country that was just emerging from the extreme poverty and despair of the Famine years, where dance music was highly valued, these instruments were just what the doctor ordered.



Figure 26. Mary Ann Carolan (1902-1985) of the Hill of Rath, County Louth, with German concertina. Jim MacArdle, of nearby Drogheda, is seated next to her. Photo courtesy of the Irish Traditional Music Archive.

### A popular pastime goes into decline

Almost all of the clippings found in this study as “sightings” of the playing of German or Anglo-German concertinas are from the period 1854-1930 (excepting the years of the traditional music revival of the 1970s and later, of which more below). They show that during most of this period, use of the concertina was widespread; oral accounts corroborate this, at least for the early decades of the twentieth century. Beginning about 1920, however, its use began to decline precipitously and paralleled the equally steep declines occurring in England, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and North America at that time. A leading culprit was the growing popularity of recorded music (the gramophone) and the radio. With the advent of recorded or broadcast music, average people no longer had to learn to play an instrument to be able to have music at home, so usage of all musical instruments began to decrease. A 1925 article in the *Irish Independent* entitled “Is the piano a thing of the past?”, subtitled “Revolution by Gramophone,” showed that this global phenomena was taking hold in Ireland as well:

*(The home piano) is being superseded by the gramophone. . . . It is the fashion to be lazy nowadays, and the percentage of those epicures who do not actually play the piano—that is, almost 90%—have taken to the gramophone . . . . People who, a few years ago, would be crowding into the (music) halls are now staying at home sunk into their armchairs, listening to their gramophone.<sup>166</sup>*

In many rural and working class homes that musical role had been filled by the humble German concertina rather than piano, but the effect was the same.

Another detrimental effect contributing to the concertina's demise was the fact that global popular music was rapidly becoming more chromatic under the influence of ragtime, jazz, and other new genres. This musical evolution was bad for the two-row, Anglo-German concertina, because the instrument lacked the chromatic

capacity to play some of this new music. In the United States and England, more chromatic instruments like mandolins, guitars, and ukuleles quickly overtook concertinas and accordions in general popularity and the concertina soon became something that your aunt or uncle had played. For modernist Irish whose tastes leaned toward the latest musical fashions, the Anglo-German concertina became unfashionable, although there were some in the late 1920s, such as the concertina player in this group in 1927 Kerry, who gamely tried the new music:

*The advent of the monoplane has given Ballybunion and West Kerry red-letter days, for when it became known yesterday that (the Princess Xenia) had landed on Beale Strand crowds gathered there all day today from many parts of Kerry and even Limerick. . . . A small fleet of motor, sailing, and row boats were anchored off the shore, and in one case a jazz band, composed of two violins, a saxophone and a concertina, played selections during the evening.<sup>167</sup>*

Such accounts are few and far between, however.

The general decline in concertina playing can be seen in the virtual absence of any mention of the concertina in Irish newspaper stories appearing after 1930 and before the traditional revival began in the 1970s. The types of stories that are reported above, where the concertina is a bystander to a crime perhaps, or a prize in a raffle, or played by a policeman or a civil protester, do not occur when the concertina is no longer in general use. Remaining (and few) references were more likely to bemoan its disappearance from popular culture in most of the country, such as a note from Myles na gCopaleen (a pseudonym of writer Brian O’Nolan, who also wrote under the pen name Flann O’Brien) in 1949. In it, he discussed the “cloud of bad times that hangs over rural Ireland:”

*We may talk about the “Harp of Tara” and the “Minstrel Boy” but we all know that when the Concertina and the Bag Pipes left the Cottage the heart left the Country.<sup>168</sup>*



Figure 27. Eugene Barkman, Glenosheen, Co. Limerick. Photograph by the late Tom Munnely, 1985. With thanks to the National Folklore Archive, University College Dublin.



Figure 28. Unidentified concertina player, ca. 1960. With thanks to Chris Corlett and the Irish Traditional Music Archive, Dublin.

Although Dublin newspapers, especially the *Irish Times*, contain frequent advertisements for concertinas from the 1860s through World War I, after about 1918 such advertisements became rare. Butler's in Dublin kept going throughout the early 1920s, but other old vendors disappeared or dropped the concertina from their advertising. By the 1930s, the once-common marketing of concertinas by musical and general merchants effectively ceased to be recorded by advertisements in Irish newspapers.

Although the appearance of the gramophone and the beginning of the jazz age were seminal events, they weren't the only reasons for the concertina's decline. Irish music continued into the middle twentieth century with the popular new céili bands, of which there were scores; the trend reached its peak in the 1950s and 1960s. Paradoxically, the concertina did not figure with any particular prominence in these bands, despite

its earlier popularity in house and crossroads dancing. Some players made the transition to the céili bands—Chris Dronney, for example, played in the Bell Harbour céili band along with his father and later went on to be a member of the Kilfenora and Four Courts céili bands. Many others, however, gave up the concertina during this period, and the instrument lost ground in the transition from private house dances to céilis in public halls.

A part of the reason for this loss of popularity in bands has to do with the size and makeup of the bands themselves, and their effect on players of the German concertina. The old concertina players tended to play on the C row in the key of C; they could also play in G. These are the keys in which it is easiest to play in octaves—one would either remain on the C or G row for the entire tune, or cross back and forth between the C and G rows. They played simply, to the beat of the dancers' feet, and without a lot of ornamentation. The

octaves were played for volume, because in the days of the house dances there was no room for a large band; the concertina more often than not played alone. After the Dance Halls act of 1935, when music and dance moved from houses to large public dance halls, the typical “band” grew from a concertina or a fiddle player to a large group comprised of instruments like fiddles, flutes, pianos, banjos, pipes, double bass, button accordions, and drums. The keys in which it was most convenient for all of these musicians to play in unison were the “fiddle” keys of G, D, and A—which meant the players of the old two-row concertinas were out of luck. Even for those who moved up to a three-row instrument (necessary for playing in the keys of D and A), the additional keys required a paradigm shift in their approach to the instrument.

This shift involved a move to the “inside” G row. The required new style involved leaving behind much of the beloved octave ornamentation and learning the unusual scales of D and A (including reaching up to the top row for the sharps). It was a bridge too far for many an old country player; the days of the house dance were over, and along with them, the days of the old German concertina.

Other unintended side effects of the Dance Hall act hurt *all* players of traditional music, especially the introduction of still newer forms of foreign dances. The noted musician Junior Crehan (1908-1998) of Ballymakea, Mullagh, County Clare (Figure 29), played concertina (as did his mother) and fiddle at this time:

*I played at country house dances, at weddings, at concerts, and crossroads. About 1936 the house dances were banned by the government and the Dance Hall Act was passed. The halls were built and jazz and foxtrots were the dances and the country man couldn't cope. It was the greatest crime ever committed against our culture and way of life. The country house was our workshop and school. It was there we learned our music song and dance. At that time and for a good few years after music song and dance faded away and most of my pals who played with me emigrated to America. It was a sad lonesome time.<sup>169</sup>*



Figure 29. Martin ‘Junior’ Crehan (1908-1998), left, playing concertina with his son, the late Tony Crehan, at the Willie Clancy Summer School, 1986. Photo by the late Tom Munnelly, with thanks to the National Folklore Archive, University College Dublin.

## Survival in County Clare

Crehan's narrative of abrupt twentieth-century decline might have signaled the end of the story for the concertina but for its continued use by a new generation that consisted of perhaps a few dozen hardy traditional musicians in County Clare during the lean years from about 1930 through the 1960s. This continued use occurred largely out of the view of the general Irish public, and seemingly entirely out of view of the newspapers. Because of the efforts of these few musicians, however, when a late-twentieth-century revitalization came to Irish music, active, living proponents of the concertina still existed. The concertina revival in Ireland started from that core of survivors. This was a vastly different situation from that experienced in New Zealand and America—both of which once had thriving groups of concertina players that had vanished without much of a trace. It was also strikingly different from the situation at the time in neighboring England, with its even richer tradition of concertina players in both cities and countryside. By the time the concertina and folk music revivals arrived there, less than a handful of surviving players were ultimately recorded. As a result most revival players in England started purely from scratch, at least as far as traditional concertina playing techniques were concerned (see Chapter 2).

Why the relatively high concentration of "survivor" players in County Clare? As we have seen, the instrument had been played in all parts of the country, and no extraordinary circumstances surrounded its arrival and distribution in Clare. There seems to be a variety of reasons. Ireland, still a very poor country in the early and middle twentieth century, was slow to electrify, especially in its poorest western areas like County Clare. In and near Clare, it was only in 1929 that the Shannon Estuary was harnessed to provide power to an electrical grid connecting the large towns of Ennis, Limerick, and Galway. Much of the surrounding rural countryside waited until after World War II for electricity; about four hundred and twenty thousand customers were finally linked to power by Ireland's Electricity

Supply Board between 1947 and 1979.<sup>170</sup> This meant that many poor parts of the west—which included many of the last bastions of traditional Irish music and Gaelic culture—were not to receive electricity and all its attendant cultural side effects until twenty-five or fifty years or more later than their Dublin, London, and New York counterparts. Noel Hill remembers the arrival of electricity to his home in Caharea, only eight miles from Ennis in County Clare, when he was eight years old (*ca.* 1964). Prior to that time, his family had a wind-up gramophone. It may not be wholly coincidental that his house was one of the last in his area to host house dances.<sup>171</sup> For all the negative effects on the local economy, this late arrival of electricity had a slowing effect on change and a preservative effect on local traditions, which perhaps benefited the concertina. Continued poverty played its role too; even with electricity one needed money to buy new electrical gadgets like radios and gramophones. It was not until "sometime during the 1930s" that noted concertina player Elizabeth Crotty bought a radiogram (a combination radio and gramophone) "which was only the second to arrive in Kilrush at the time."<sup>172</sup>

The arrival of better-quality concertinas may have been another significant factor in the continued use of the instrument by its few remaining players during those lean years. Although newspaper reports discussed above show that English-made Anglo-German instruments were available for purchase in Dublin from their very beginnings in the 1860s, such expensive items were in short supply in the rural west well into the early twentieth century. Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin notes that many Jeffries, Wheatstone, and Lachenal instruments began to show up in London antique shops after World War II, and that Clare émigrés there shipped them back to relatives.<sup>173</sup> Ned Falvey of Kilmaley, County Clare, was one who seemed to have played an especially prominent role in such distribution of quality used instruments, bringing them home in his suitcase when visiting.<sup>174</sup> These better instruments breathed new life into Clare playing, allowing some players like Paddy Murphy to experiment with new, fully three-row

fingerings, and allowing all to play with other instruments (especially fiddle and pipes) in optimal keys. The more complex side of some Irish tunes could now be more fully realized on the concertina, and no longer would it be considered a “step down” from other Irish instruments, as it was in O’Neill’s day.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, we must also credit the dogged persistence of many Clare players who—although discouraged by the effects of the Dance Hall Act, by the low status to which traditional music and musicians had fallen, by continued rural poverty, and by the loss of friends and musicians to emigration—continued to make time in their lives for continuing the social traditions of their families and communities. In contrast, in those communities in Ireland where the new music and dance forms of the global jazz age were fully embraced the concertina quickly disappeared from usage and memory, almost without a trace.

## *The Evolution of Irish Playing Styles and Techniques*

It is difficult to approach the very complex subject of the evolution of style and technique on the concertina, which relates both to the cultural environment of the musician as well as his or her highly individual preferences and skills. Nonetheless, there are several large trends that run through Irish concertina playing that broadly correlate with several distinct eras in Irish dance and culture from the late nineteenth century to the present. Those three eras are:

### **1. House dances in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century:**

Music for these dances was typically provided by one or two musicians during a time when houses were small and general poverty reigned in many rural western areas. In most of Ireland, imported European ballroom-style dances (such as quadrilles or set dances, polkas, and waltzes) were in great vogue, along with the older, step dances (jigs, reels, and hornpipes).

### **2. Public dances, beginning in the early twentieth century:**

The Gaelic League introduced céili dances, which at the beginning of the movement were figure dances in the longways and circle forms of earlier country dance. This, coupled with the general disappearance of unlicensed house dances that resulted from the Dance Hall Act of 1935, moved dancing from a domestic and crossroads setting to community and parish halls. The music for these public dances tended to be played by larger groups of musicians who used a variety of musical instruments. Céilís have continued to evolve, and today are comprised mostly of set dances.

### **3. Pub sessions of the traditional music revival:**

This era, roughly beginning in the 1960s, marks a movement by the majority of active players away from playing for dancing and toward more of a focus on playing for listening at competitions and in pub sessions.



A series of profound evolutionary developments in playing styles and techniques on the concertina occurred during this same period that, although not entirely and perfectly congruent with the above cultural shifts in dance, nonetheless essentially parallel the above eras. These three styles include *octave playing*, a technique which underpinned most playing in the house-dance era; *along-the-row playing*, which became the predominant technique in the public dance hall era; and modern *three-row, highly ornamented playing*, which developed during the traditional music revival. Each is discussed in some detail below.

The following outline of the development of playing techniques among Irish concertina players relies partly on the groundbreaking work of Clare native, fourth-generation concertina player, and music historian Gearóid Ó hAilmhuráin (Figure 30), whose 1990 doctoral thesis presented at Queen's University in Belfast included lengthy interviews of numerous concertina players in and around Clare.



Figure 30. Gearóid and Tiarnán Ó hAilmhuráin, 2005.

### Octave playing in the era of late-nineteenth-century house dances

Octave playing is a two-handed technique where melody notes are played two notes at a time throughout the tune, an octave apart. Tunes were usually played in C, the most convenient key for octave playing (although tunes in G and F were also common). The double-noting in octaves provided a boost in volume, and ornamentation was kept simple, because the focus was on the dance, and the house dance musician often played alone. The two basic variants are *single-row* and *two-row* octave playing.

**Single-row octave-style playing.** One of the earliest-born Irish concertina players to have been recorded was Margaret Scanlon “Baby” Crehan (1876-1968), the mother of noted fiddle and concertina player Martin “Junior” Crehan (1908-1998) of Ballymakea, Mullagh, County Clare. In the 1960s at the age of eighty-seven, she was recorded on a home tape recorder and is one of very few from the generation before Junior Crehan to have had her playing captured on tape. These recordings, recently released within a CD of Junior Crehan’s playing,<sup>2</sup> include a march and a double jig. A transcription of the jig, *Sweet Biddy Daly*, is included among the transcriptions in Chapter 10. She played it in the key of C, all on the outside (C) row, almost entirely in octaves with no other ornaments. To modern ears her playing sounds quite basic, but such a judgment overlooks the purpose for which she played in her youth. Tommy McCarthy (1939-2002) put it this way:

*At the house dances, 't was mostly fiddle, flute and concertina. There wasn't as much music played at that time for listening to like we have today. . . . They'd dance better to a concertina than anything. 'T was just the sound of it I think. It didn't matter how good you were, as long as you had the rhythm and they could get in t'ould batter. The technique in the music didn't mean a thing. Nice straight simple music and to be quite abrupt about it, you could be a great player and if your rhythm didn't suit them, they'd think you*

were no good. That was the situation on any instrument. If you hadn't that ould rhythm, that you could dance nice to, the tune you were playin' or the way you were playin' it didn't matter much. The grand notes you'd be puttin' in or the parts of the tune itself didn't mean anything because the dancers didn't take a bit of notice to it.<sup>3</sup>

It also helped if the dancers could hear the concertina in a crowded house filled with lots of conversation and of course the noise of the hobnails battering the flagstone. As concertina player Sean O'Dwyer (whose own mother, Ellen O'Dwyer, also played primarily in an octave style on the German concertina) mused:

*The old style of concertina playing in this country was that of double-hand [octave] playing of the melody, especially for polka dances. One wonders was it a style which evolved from the lack of amplification? Did the player have to resort to this "trick" to get himself heard above the din of the dancers?*<sup>4</sup>

One might well look abroad for the answer to that question. In parts of Australia, notably in New South Wales and Victoria, the custom of rural house dancing lasted well into the twentieth century; no Dance Hall Act existed there to restrict such musical gatherings. Transcriptions of tunes from a number of old-time, pre-folk revival, Australian concertina players are included in Chapter 10. All of the early players there who were recorded, men and women alike, were octave players (see Chapter 7). Their playing, like that of Mrs. Crehan, was simple, unadorned, and in octaves—perfectly suited to the dancers. The dances in use there were comprised of a similar mix of nineteenth-century ballroom dances (quadrilles, polkas, waltzes, et cetera). Most of those who were recorded were professional players in their day, and travelled from house dance to house dance, where they typically played solo for dances that would last all night. Clem O'Neal (1912-1980), who came from a mining town in New South Wales, was one of those players. His description of the dances there could

easily fit dances prevalent in nineteenth-century Clare:

*The dances were out in country places, mostly in the houses [which normally had] dirt floors or flagstone floors. Quite a lot of the houses were small. Some people danced inside the house and quite a lot danced outside the house. The concertina player moved about from room to room carrying the concertina . . . and so there were times when those outside couldn't hear him. The player just moved around in among them and some [players] actually waltzed in time with them to get through.*<sup>5</sup>

Albert "Dooley" Chapman (1892-1982) was from Coborrah, New South Wales. As Clareman Tommy McCarthy mentioned above, the dancers were the customers and they often were not satisfied, especially with players who were not up to the task. Chapman described those poor-quality players as follows:

*They weren't as good as the best of them, that's for sure. See, the time wouldn't be there. No, no. See the waltz and the schottische, all them was all to the step. What you'd find even in many players, you put them out to play for the dancers and see where they are. See the waltz, the schottische and the varsoviana and that. See if they're on to the step. Well, what are they doing?*

*When I was playing, if only I missed a note, by God, you'd see them [the dancers] look 'round, yes that's right . . . they'd had it, if you only missed one note! Which didn't happen too often then, I can assure you.*<sup>6</sup>

Another rural culture with house dances at this time was that of the Boers in part of what is now South Africa (the area that comprised the Boer Republics before the Anglo-Boer Wars). Like the Irish and the Australians, they were mesmerized by then-fashionable ballroom dances—in their case mostly polkas, waltzes, and schottisches (flings), although quadrilles were also danced. Here, too, solo concertinas provided the music; and here, too, the music was played in

octaves. The following brief snippets are from 1900 and 1907, respectively:

*They danced on the mud floor in the voorkammer—the living room of the house, into which the door opens from the outside—and the dust rose thicker and thicker until you could scarcely see across the other room. Then there was a pause, during which they watered the floor, and it, of course, became thick mud, and was ruination to the dresses. But the Boer girls . . . are accustomed to dirt in the ballroom, so they do not take their soiled raiment much to heart. On they go, dancing merrily, often to the **concertina** where they can't get a piano, with their arms entwined around each other's necks in the Dutch fashion.<sup>7</sup>*

*The stranger will be able to obtain much pleasure by attending, as an invited guest, a typical Boer wedding. Every guest is expected to salute the bride with a loving kiss, and should the festivities conclude with a dance, he will admire the endurance of the meisjes [young women]. Dancing will be kept up vigorously in the sweltering voorhuis [front room of the house] to the strains of a seemingly tireless **concertina**. As the floors of many of these dwellings are composed of hardened mud, and the stretching of wagon sails, well greased, is the general preparation for dancing, it can be imagined that the "going" is not easy.<sup>8</sup>*

Some of the earliest recordings of Boer dance music were made in the early 1930s; transcriptions of the playing of Hans Bodenstein and Chris Chomse from that time (included in Chapter 10) show them playing entirely in octaves. Like many Irish polkas, these are not simple pieces, and yet they are played at a very brisk tempo for dancing—octave playing was not a ponderous affair. Although our stock of recordings of the earlier-generation Irish players who were active before the 1930s consists mainly of octogenarians who were not in their prime,<sup>9</sup> we must assume that they were well up to the task, just as their more-recorded sons and daughters were in the middle of the twentieth century. It is

worth mentioning that the Boers who were recorded in the 1930s had already shifted to imported, Anglo-German concertinas, but there is a back-to-basics movement underway there today; some are returning to German-style, two-row, double-reeded concertinas that are built locally today to a high standard (see Chapter 5).

These examples show that the use of octave playing represents a separate but convergent evolution in technique. With a need generated by the inherent nature of house dances for music played simply at a sprightly pace with plenty of volume, by a musician who played (for the most part) alone, it seems that nearly any experienced player would respond to these requirements by adopting the octave technique.

**Two-row octave-style playing.** Some octave players favored tunes that could be kept entirely on the C row, as Mrs. Crehan did with *Sweet Biddy Daly*. However, most others in Ireland, Australia, and South Africa developed a two-row style that utilized both rows in the playing of a tune. Fiddle and concertina player John Kelly (1912-1989), of Rehy West, in southwestern County Clare, learned to play the concertina from his mother, Eliza Keane, who played the German concertina. An aunt, uncle, and grandmother also played, so his roots in the genre were very deep indeed.<sup>10</sup> Kelly's real learning on the instrument, however, was from a woman named Mary Houlihan, who had mastered the octave style, or "double style" as he called it:

*She was supposed to have been the queen of them. It was like going to high school. When I graduated from home I went to her and got a good bit of instruction from her. She learnt the double style of playing from a man by the name of Patrick Murphy from Frure. I heard afterwards that his father was a tailor and he came back there [Loop Head] during the War of Independence. I don't know whether Murphy was on the run or whether he was working back there. But 't was he showed her the double style of goin' across the keys, and she had it very good. She had a beautiful **concertina**, wherever in the name of God she got*

it, I don't know. There was a great sound in it . . .  
*'T was a high class German concertina.*<sup>11</sup>

What Kelly meant by saying “across the keys” is the practice, within the octave technique, of playing the lower parts of a tune on the C row and the higher parts on the G row instead of keeping the entire tune on the C row as Mrs. Crehan did in the jig discussed above. The elements of this technique are discussed in some detail in Chapter 10. In its most basic fashion, the first four notes of the C scale (*do-re-mi-fa*) are played on the C row, with the left hand playing those notes in the lower octave, while the right hand is playing the same notes an octave higher. The last four notes of the scale (*sol-la-ti-do*) are played on the G row in the same manner. This allows one to play an entire tune in octaves, whereas a one-row octave player occasionally must give up the octaves and play singly when the melody wanders either too high or too low for the compass of the single row.

There are few Irish recordings of the style that Kelly describes; one of them is the old polka *I Have a Bonnet Trimmed in Blue* as played by the late Bernard O'Sullivan (d. 2007) with Tommy McMahon, for which a transcription is included in Chapter 10. O'Sullivan claimed that most of his old tunes were learned note-for-note from famed Clare concertina player Mick “Stack” Ryan, who also taught Tommy McCarthy to play; this tune may thus be one of Ryan's. The first four notes, in a low part of the scale, are played on the C row, and the next four on the G row; the rest of the tune bounces back and forth from one row to the other. Two-row octave playing is a powerful technique, not only for volume but for its ease of playing and the accuracy it imparts; one can play in this manner with great intuitive confidence, and it seems perfect for dancing. Their technique in playing *Bonnet* is closely similar to that of Australian Dooley Chapman's *Old Dan Tucker* (Chapter 10), also a two-row octave tune.

Concertina players have often remarked that polkas like *I Have a Bonnet Trimmed in Blue* are intrinsically easy to play in a way that reels are not. As Tommy McCarthy put it:

*There was a lot of Kerry music played around here. . . . I'm talkin' . . . over fifty or sixty or maybe seventy years ago and I think they fell into a lot of polka playin'. Even in the country house dances a lot of polkas used to be played. Then of course Clare people used to go across to Kerry and brought polkas back with them. For the older sets the polka was easier than the reels. You could be playin' an old polka away for half an hour—not that there was anything wrong with it, but 't was easier on the musician and handier.*<sup>12</sup>

There is a reason for this. The polka came to Ireland (and nearly everywhere else) in about 1844, which was within a few years of the German concertina's appearance there. The ballroom dances that were all the rage in the late nineteenth century (quadrilles or sets, polkas, schottisches, waltzes, and varsovianas) “grew up” at a time when the concertina was king—at least with rural players and others with modest incomes in not only Ireland but England, Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and South Africa. As a result, the concertina and its close cousin, the one-row button accordion, played a large role in the composition of those ballroom dance tunes—or did so once those dances left the elegant ballrooms of Europe and headed into the countryside. Polkas are filled with third- and fifth jumps that are quite simple to execute on a concertina, as no change in bellows direction is required. The reel, on the other hand, is a vastly older musical form. Its repertoire is filled with tunes composed by pipers and fiddle players whose instruments differed greatly from the humble German concertina, both in design and characteristics (see discussion below, accompanying Mrs. Crotty's version of *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*).

Most of the players who were recorded in the old octave style, on German concertinas, were women; players like Ella Mae O'Dwyer and Margaret Crehan come to mind. Because they played at home amongst family and friends, they tended to hold on to earlier styles much more than did male players. One such player was Mary Ann Carolan (1902-1985), who both played concertina and sang traditional songs in County Louth

(Figure 23). She was born in Tenure, a few miles northwest of Drogheda. Her father, Pat Usher, was born in 1866, and has the distinction of being the earliest-born concertina player in Ireland (or anywhere else) to be recorded—he was recorded by the Irish broadcasters RTE in 1959. Mary Ann Carolan was raised in a musical family, where house dances were a common occurrence. As she put it in a 1985 interview,

*I used to play for the half sets in the house, at home...we used to have a bit of fun on a Sunday night. A big swing-around and polka....Around where I lived, at home, we just had the sets. We called them the half set, and we'd have a whole set when we had the number [of dancers].*

Mary Ann Carolan's repertoire contained more ballroom dance music than it did the jigs and reels that have become the national default repertoire for traditional Irish music. These dance tunes of hers, and her father's, included quadrilles (often created from old song tunes), single jigs, polkas, and flings (schottisches)—most of them the tunes used in the sets. This mix is perhaps more similar to the repertoire of the Sliabh Luachra area of the Cork/Kerry border than it is to that of Clare. Archived RTE recordings show that she typically played in the key of C in a two-row octave style, on a CG German concertina that had double notes tuned an octave apart. The melody was played first and foremost on the right hand. Usually her left hand played the melody an octave down, but often she dropped out most notes on the left hand, keeping a few to accentuate the rhythm—a technique shared with the English musician William Kimber, although she did not typically play chords. She makes it quite clear that volume (one of the benefits of octave playing) was an important part of her dance music. When asked in a 1985 RTE interview about the demise of the concertina in the middle and late twentieth century, Carolan said, "It has died out. There are better instruments—louder. Louder instruments."

Most of her playing was done when she was young, and living at home in Tenure. After she married a farmer and moved to the Hill of Rath, closer to Drogheda, the dancing stopped for her and she concentrated on raising a family. For

several decades she was without a concertina, and only returned to concertina playing late in life. For this reason her repertoire is of particular interest, as it harkens back to the era of house dances and the sets—a time before the céili dance movement and the later traditional music revival changed our modern vision of what Irish traditional music is. In 2010, a group of musicians led by Jim MacArdle of Drogheda prepared a CD of tunes from Carolan and from other of the older generation of County Louth musicians. They aimed to recreate that earlier more regional repertoire in that CD, which is entitled *Madam, I'd Like to Be Tossin' Your Hay*. MacArdle, a concertina player, knew, recorded and learned from Carolan.

The late Solus Lillis, a blacksmith and concertina player from Clonreddan, near Cooraclare in West Clare, had a mother who, like Carolan, was an octave player. Lillis recalled that:

*I started to play when I was no more than eight or nine years old or less, maybe. My mother used to play. A lot of old people used to play, you know. They sounded a lot of base keys down below on the left hand side of the concertina. A lot of unnecessary noise I used to call it. They had more or less only the bones of the tune, a lot of them; the old women especially. 'T was nearly all women who played around here. They never played for tape recorders or anything like that.<sup>13</sup>*

The "unnecessary" low notes Lillis refers to are the lower octave notes on the C row, used when playing in the key of C. Clearly there was a generation shift in Clare in the early twentieth century, after which most octave playing has disappeared except in isolated phrases or in certain "old" tunes; John Kelly, Solus Lillis, and Sean O'Dwyer belong to the younger generation who left the old octave style behind. As Solus Lillis mentioned, most octave playing disappeared before much of it was recorded. We have recordings of Margaret Crehan, Mary Ann Carolan, Ellen O'Dwyer, and a few handed-down tunes kept by players like Bernard O'Sullivan in the next generation—that is it.

This generational shift away from octave playing in the key of C roughly correlates with the shift from house dances to more public venues in the early twentieth century. In house dances, where a concertina player was often the sole musician, a simple style with a lot of volume was needed; the key the tune was played in did not matter. As dance took to public places and playing with groups of fiddlers, flutes, and pipers in céili bands and the like became more common, playing in the key of C sharply declined, as did playing in octaves. In Australia, octave style playing (typically in the key of C) continued well into the twentieth century (Chapter 7), perhaps because house dances remained the primary social medium in the “bush” until about World War II.

#### **Along-the-row playing in the era of public dances**

Playing only *one* note at a time, while keeping to either the C or G row of the basic, push-pull diatonic concertina, is of course the most straightforward way to approach the German or Anglo-German concertina, and this basic technique has been around as long as the instrument. With only a little adjusting, as well as the addition of a third row of keys for a few accidentals, that technique is adaptable to playing in the keys of F, D, and even A. Playing in these additional keys is very useful when playing with fiddles, flutes, and pipes—something that became much more prevalent as céili bands emerged for playing in the larger public dance halls. More importantly, along-the-row playing has the considerable advantage of allowing greater speed for the playing of reels. These were key factors in the decisions of a new generation of Irish players to move beyond the old octave playing in the key of C into an era where dance music was played primarily along-the-row in the keys of G and D. Ornamentation continued to be typically light, as the focus was still on playing for the dance. Some along-the-row players continued to insert occasional octave phrases as an ornament but this was not an integral part of the technique.

As with octave playing, there are two basic variants. Along-the-row playing could involve

strict adherence to a *single row*, or could involve *two-row* playing on two rows (the C and G rows), where each phrase was matched with the most suitable row.

**Single-row playing along-the-row.** For the old-style, cross-row octave players, where each hand plays the same melody largely independently of the other hand, the melody was played by only four fingers of one hand and these fingers were kept very busy. But by doing away with the octave notes and instead playing one note at a time and along-the-row, one now has eight fingers rather than four available to play the melody, as it runs up and down through its compass of notes on one row. Older octave-style players like Pat Usher (b. 1866) of County Louth tended to drop the octave style when playing reels, as they are much more easily played along-the-row. As the repertoire moved slowly away from ballroom and set dances—typically plaid at a more relaxed tempo—to a more steady diet of older jigs and reels in the céili era, players adjusted by playing in the along-the-row manner. Moreover, if one played along-the-row on the inside (G) row, playing in the key of D (the second most common key after G in Irish music) could also be accomplished by occasionally reaching off of the G row for the needed extra sharp. This shift in keys was needed of course when playing in large céili bands. From oral histories, including the above interviews, the along-the-row style appears to have become the dominant one in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Perhaps the all-time master of the single-row, along-the-row style was William Mullaly (1884–1955) of Milltown, near Mullingar in County Westmeath. Mullaly was the first musician to record Irish music on the concertina, making a set of recordings in 1926–1927 just after he immigrated to America (Figure 31). He learned to play from a local woman, Mrs. Heydune, at a time when the house dance was the main form of social amusement in the area. Unlike the old German-concertina players, he had a higher quality Anglo-German concertina—very probably a Wheatstone Linota—which allowed reels and rapid-fire jigs to be played with considerably more ease. His 78rpm

recordings display a rapid, intricate, and driving musical style that has dazzled listeners for decades. Recently, in preparation for a new release of Mullaly's recordings by the Irish Traditional Music Archive in Dublin, musician Jackie Small transcribed all of Mullaly's tunes.<sup>14</sup> An example is the *Tory Island Reel*, included in the transcriptions of Chapter 10 (note: it has been modified slightly from Small's transcription, mainly by annotation of all the octave notes played). The results of Small's analysis of those recordings are surprising but inescapable: Mullaly played all of his music on the inside (D) row of a concertina that was very probably pitched in G and D. An instrument tuned in G and D was a rarity at the time, so it seems likely that Mullaly purchased a Wheatstone pitched in Ab/Eb (commonly made for Salvation Army bands) and had it re-tuned to G/D. The *Tory Island Reel*, like many of his tunes, is not played in the "home" key of D. Instead the tune is played in Em, which requires only one sharp, in contrast to the two sharps available on the D row. Rather than reaching into the adjacent row for the necessary C naturals, Mullaly instead simply utilizes the available C sharps on the D row. The irregularities impart an eerie modal quality to the piece.

In many ways, as Jackie Small points out,

Mullaly's playing presages the techniques of modern players, especially in his frequent use of ornaments. Triplets are perhaps most common and are played in places where a bellows' direction change is not required. However, there are also generous helpings of cuts, octave notes, and drones in his repertoire that are quite unlike the simpler, relatively unadorned style of earlier Clare players. Most of this may be related to the fact that he had a much more responsive Anglo-German concertina. Because Mullaly's playing is strictly push-pull along a single row, his sound is not unlike that of the famous one-row accordion player of that era, John Kimmel.

John Kelly (1912-1989) of Rehy West, southwest Co. Clare (Figure 32), whose early instructor, Mary Houlihan, was an octave player, chose instead to play mostly in a single-row, along-the-row manner, as shown by a transcription of one of his reels, *The Crooked Road to Dublin*, in Chapter 10. The 1974 recording from which the transcription was made is included in a CD entitled simply *John Kelly*, by Free Reed Records. His choice of this technique over that of octaves was likely associated with his life-long playing of the fiddle—his preferred instrument—as well as the fact that he often played in sessions with groups of musicians. In

Figure 31. William J. Mullaly (1884-ca. 1955), the first Irish concertina player to be recorded, in a photo taken around 1926. With thanks to Nicholas Carolan and Jackie Small at the Irish Traditional Music Archive, Dublin.





Figure 32. John Kelly (1912-1989), of Rehy West, County Clare and Capel Street Dublin, playing at the Willie Clancy School, 1986. Photo by Tom Munnely, courtesy the National Folklore Archive, University College Dublin.

Figure 33. Chris Droney of Bell Harbour, north Clare, with concertina, ca. 1948. Courtesy the Irish Traditional Music Archive, Dublin. He played a Lachenal two-row, 20 key concertina early in life (shown), and purchased a Wheatstone three-row in London in 1960.





this tune, he plays nearly entirely on the inside (G) row. Like many early players, he played the tune simply, with ornaments chiefly in the form of triplets and a few octave phrases.

Chris Droney of Bellharbour, County Clare (Figure 33) is perhaps the most well-known player today in what is basically a single-row style. A farmer by trade, he has played for dances all his life, often within groups of musicians. He played in the early Bellharbour Céili Band with his father, and later with the Kilfenora and Four Courts céili bands. His own style, according to Droney, came from his father and his grandfather, who both played the concertina.<sup>15</sup> As might be expected of one devoted to the dance, his music is very rhythmic and simply played, without a lot of ornamentation. He plays on the inside (G) row, rarely leaving it, much as Mullaly dwelled on the D row of his instrument. Unlike Mullaly, however, who seems never to have left the single row for any reason, Droney will leave that single row to reach for a necessary C# when playing in the key of D. He is fond of inserting phrases of octaves when it suits the piece or the instrument. Droney's style and technique has been well-described in Canadian player Frank Edgley's tutor for the Irish concertina.<sup>16</sup>

**Two-row along-the-row style.** Many traditional (pre-folk revival) Clare players would play a melody that was keyed in G using both the C and G rows, switching phrases back and forth between the two rows, although individual phrases were still played in a push-pull manner along a single row. The playing of Michael Doyle (1897-1970), a neighbor and friend of Junior Crehan in Ballymakea, is an early example. Doyle was a soldier in the original Irish Republican Army during the Irish War of Independence, and later was a farmer. He travelled in good musical company, frequently playing for house dances in his early years with Junior Crehan or with Thady Casey, who was a noted fiddler and dancing master of the area. Famed piper Willie Clancy was the godfather of his daughter Theresa, so presumably there was a musical tie there as well. The late Kitty Hayes knew him well and held him in high regard; when late in her life she heard an

old recording of Doyle, she reportedly exclaimed: "My God, his playin' is even more old-fashioned than my own!"<sup>17</sup>

Doyle played a simple German concertina all his life, preferring its tone—that of the old country sound—over the "sharp" sound of an "English" (meaning Anglo-German) instrument. He was recorded late in life by musician John Joe Healy, and those field recordings are now accessible at the Irish Traditional Music Archive in Dublin. Of them, the *Mount Phoebeus Hunt*, a hornpipe in the key of G, has been selected for transcription in Chapter 10. Although the first part of the tune is played entirely on the C row, the second part alternates back and forth between the C and G rows. In general, the higher parts are played on the G row and the lower parts on the C row. This ability to cross the rows is similar to the row-changing in the two-row octave style. Doyle's ornamentation primarily includes octave notes and triplets. He played frequently with fiddle players, and probably for that reason most of his recordings are in the key of G.

#### **Modification of tunes to fit the concertina.**

Doyle's reels are brisk and up to tempo, and very vigorously played. This is quite an effort on a wheezy old German concertina, and he can be heard emitting a good-natured groan at one stage in one of the recordings. The playing of the reel, as Tommy McCarthy pointed out above, is a more strenuous endeavor than playing the polka. In particular, scale runs—successions of notes that are each a single diatonic note apart—are difficult to play rapidly on the German concertina, either singly or in octaves, because every other note entails a bellows direction change when played in the old push-pull style, along the row. As mentioned earlier, the reel is a dance form that pre-dates the concertina, and most tunes in the classic repertoire of reels were devised by fiddle, flute, or pipe players. Scale runs are relatively easy on those instruments.

Some of the best of the old concertina players would alter a reel to make it easier to play, often creating an interesting variation in the process. A good example is from the playing of Elizabeth Markham Crotty (1885-1960) of Gower,

near Cooraclare (Figure 34). She played the German concertina in her youth for house dances and the like, and only later in life purchased a Lachenal Anglo-German concertina. She was recorded by Ciarán Mac Mathúna of Raidió Éireann in the 1950s playing *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* and *The Reel with the Beryl*. Playing these tunes on the air made her a much-respected celebrity within the traditional music community. Her version of *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* was considered quite distinctive, and a transcription of it is included in Chapter 10. Its unique quality stems in large part from efforts made—most likely by master player Crotty herself—to make the tune more concertina-friendly.

Mrs. Crotty played in the old octave style in most of the B part (which is played on both the C and G rows), but the A part is played mostly with single notes in an along-the-row style. The most distinctive part of her version is in the single-noted A part; it is jaunty and bouncy with numerous third- and fifth-interval jumps. A comparison of the first four bars of the A part with a more standard version taken from O'Neill's (1903) *Dance Music of Ireland*, is informative (Figure 35). O'Neill's version was originally written in the key of D, and has been changed to G—the key Mrs. Crotty plays it in—for the purposes of this comparison. The O'Neill version was taken from Francis O'Neill's own playing on the flute, and contains numerous scale runs. Mrs. Crotty replaces most of those scale runs with interval jumps of varying width. These jumps require fewer direction changes and are hence easier to play. For example, the second bar in O'Neill's version requires four bellows' direction changes when played along the row; Mrs Crotty's version requires none, and yet, with its interval jumps it sounds peppier than the original. This is the work of a musician of some considerable skill, who nonetheless stayed within the traditional confines of her instrument.

Packie Russell (1920-1977), a stonemason and renowned concertina player of Doonagore, Doolin, County Clare, was another two-row along-the-row player. He was recorded in 1974 along with brothers Micho and Gussie, who



Figure 34. Elizabeth Crotty and Kathleen Harrington. Photo courtesy Michael Tubridy.

played flute and whistle.<sup>18</sup> One old reel, *The Heathery Breeze*, was often played for set dances in Doolin, and a transcription of his playing of it is included in Chapter 10. In it, Russell moved confidently between the C and G row to find the most expressive and convenient phrasing. The first part is played singly, with no octaves, and seems to have been played mostly on the C row. An alternate fingering would be to play it all on the G row. Regardless, measures two and six are mostly played on the G row. The B part, like that of many reels, is higher pitched and is played mostly on the G row, largely in an octave style. There are no discernable cuts or other such grace notes; octaves and a few triplets comprise most of the sparse ornamentation.

## The Wind That Shakes the Barley Comparison, First Four Measures

Top: Francis O'Neill's version, 1903, taken from a flute

Middle: Elizabeth Crotty's version, concertina

Bottom: Noel Hill, 2005, concertina



Figure 35. A comparison of the first four bars of *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*, among Francis O'Neill (originally in D), Mrs. Crotty, and Noel Hill. See text for discussion.

### A changed paradigm: three-row ornamented playing

A three-row, more highly ornamented style of playing has developed over the past four or five decades as the primary focus of musicians has gradually changed from playing for dancing to playing for listening—either for competitions, pub sessions, or commercial music. It places a much greater emphasis on ornamentation and phrasing than earlier techniques. Styles of ornamentation have been extensively copied from those used in the playing of fiddles and pipes. The push-and-pull, along-the-row phrasing of the first two eras, although still present, is giving way (in greatly varying extents) to more fluid, alternative scales as well as to alternative fingerings of individual phrases, where notes from all three rows are pulled in to either change

the fluidity of a phrase, allow more elaborate ornamentation, or to reduce the frequency of direction changes in the bellows. In the 1950s, in a move to reverse the early-twentieth-century decline in traditional music and dance, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann began holding *fleadhs*, which were great gatherings of traditional musicians and dancers. A new feature—the element of competition with its chance of an All-Ireland award—caused a great deal of excitement among musicians and dancers alike. As Bealragga, Fiach Roe (County Clare) farmer and concertina player Paddy Murphy (1913-1992) put it,

*Well the early fleadhs in the fifties were great and very enjoyable . . . you had just the right type of people and of course there was great interest in the competitions. They were a new thing and of*

*course to win this All-Ireland at that time was considered a mighty thing. Of course, you had the real genuine people going to those early fleadhs.*<sup>19</sup>

Although not entirely new to Ireland—an advertisement of a Dublin concertina contest in 1877 is shown in Figure 14—competitive playing was certainly new to this generation of musicians, and marked the beginning of a discernable split between music and dance. Instead of mingling with dancers in crowded rooms, the musician performed on a platform where adjudicators listened, alert for well-turned phrases or rhythms or other innovative signs of playing unique to the performer that would distinguish him from his competitors. This was all done in the total absence of dancers, who from time immemorial had been the main arbiters of what was good playing and what was not. Because musicians were now being judged relative to other musicians, their perspective began to change. Perhaps another grace note will lift that phrase above the average, thereby winning the day? Perhaps playing that last phrase in a legato fashion rather than in a jerky, push-and-pull way, will do the trick? The requirement to keep the dancers' "ould rhythm" no longer held sway over the "grand notes" as players vied for the prize.

At more or less the same time or perhaps a bit later, the modern pub session made its entry. As Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin noted in his 1990 thesis on Clare concertina playing,

*The current practice of playing Irish traditional music in pubs is not particularly old. In Clare it traces its origin to the fleadh cheoil movement in the 1950s and was further reinforced by the take-off of the lounge bar phenomenon a decade later. The impact of the lounge bar as a social catalyst in the 1960s was quite outstanding. Not only did it remove the stigma of female drinking (which had been discretely confined to the sanctuary of the snug) but it also acted as a surrogate community centre for many rural parishes, especially in outlying districts in the west of Ireland. To the new generation of publicans, entertainment became a vital adjunct to economic success.*<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, American and other visitors to Ireland, familiar with folk music revivals in their own homelands, were looking for Irish traditional music. This bolstered even further the economic underpinnings of the pub session. Those who played traditional music in this new, partly commercial environment necessarily adapted by producing music that was more listenable, which in some cases meant altering the way the music was presented and played.

Paddy Murphy (Figure 36) was a bridge between the days of the céili bands and the modern day. He learned to play from two uncles who each played German concertinas. In 1940, he purchased a Wheatstone Anglo-German concertina and, with a number of friends, formed the Fiach Roe Céili Band, which played for céili for the next eighteen years. At the fleadh of 1954 in Cavan, he became the first concertina player to win the All-Ireland, later winning All-Ireland concertina titles in 1955, 1957, and 1958. These new competitions seem to have stimulated an already-keen intellect toward improving his music from the standpoint of the listener. In any case, Murphy developed a notably different way of approaching the concertina. His biographer and former pupil, Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, put it this way:

*An astute listener who perpetually sought out new tunes and tasteful settings, Paddy experimented with alternative scales, melodic runs, cuts, rolls, and double stops—many derived from fiddle, flute, and uilleann pipe music. His complex phrasing moved effortlessly through a range of dance-music metres, lacing them with a treasury of ornaments from single note cadences to subtle double-octave variations. Gentle and understated, his rhythm gave as much meaning to the illusive domain of the backbeat, as it did to the dominant beat of each measure.*<sup>21</sup>

A transcription of one of Murphy's tunes, a reel in G named *The Dawn*, is included in Chapter 10. The tune was originally an American tune, *The Miller's Reel*, composed by New England bandleader and minstrel musician Zeke Backus for the minstrels. It was played by

Murphy essentially in a two-row fashion, with most of the A part played on the C row, and most of the higher B part played on the G row. His playing is laced with ornaments, some of them of complex, multi-note composition not seen in the playing of predecessors. A triple D-B-D grace note in the second bar is played at lightning speed, all on the draw. There are numerous other cuts and triplets, and a few octave runs. In repetitions of the tune not shown in the transcription, he adds level after level of ornaments and turns of phrases in a striking show of virtuosity. This and others of his tunes define an exciting, new style of concertina music that emerged in the 1970s. Paddy Murphy had a deep impact on concertina players in Clare. One of his pupils, Ó hAllmhuráin, went on to win five All-Ireland championships, and passes those lessons on to younger concertina players to this day.



Figure 33. Paddy Murphy on concertina (right) with Peter O'Loughlin and Paddy Canny. Copyright Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin.

### *Into a New Era: the Concertina in the Irish Traditional Music Revival*

Paddy Murphy's most famous pupil, however, is Noel Hill (b. 1958) of Caherea, Clare (Figure 37). Born into a musical family, where both of his parents, his grandparents, and several aunts and uncles played the concertina, he lived in a home where the practice of house dances still occurred in his youth during the 1960s. Hill took the lessons learned from Paddy Murphy and expanded upon them, becoming an exciting presence in the new world of the global and commercial Irish traditional music that emerged in the 1970s. Although exciting and innovative, his music never loses sight of its traditional roots, as a transcription of a few bars of his version of *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* (Figure 35) demonstrates. His version plays clear homage to Mrs. Crotty's distinctive version through his choice of notes and phrasing, yet it contains much more complex ornamentation in the new style that he and his mentor Murphy pioneered. A professional musician since the 1970s, Hill has taught hundreds of pupils the basics of his techniques at schools in Ireland and abroad.

Noel Hill's style has had a truly major impact on Irish concertina players, old and new alike. As a witty Solus Lillis said in 1986,

*I'm afraid Noel Hill is the man that beats all; I suppose he is the successor to Paddy Murphy. I met a man in Ennis one day. "What do you think of Noel Hill?," says I to him.*

*"Ah, stop!" says he. "Shure! You couldn't compete with him."*

*"Why?" says I.*

*"That man has twenty fingers," says he, "and you have only two."<sup>496</sup>*

Spearheaded by Noel Hill and others, this new style, with its rich ornamentation and innovative phrasing, was completely in synch with the rapidly growing *listening* audiences for Irish music. The numbers of concertina players showing up at the annual Willie Clancy Summer School in Miltown Malbay, and later at the Eigue Mrs. Crotty in Kilrush, has increased dramatic-

ally. A 2005 Eigue Mrs. Crotty gathering (Figure 35) was attended by scores of concertina students, Irish and foreign, young and old. As can be seen in the photograph, it was graced by the presence of large numbers of women and girls as well. All of this, of course, is a far cry from the first Irish *fleadhs* in the 1950s, where a young Paddy Murphy began to perfect his craft.



Figure 37. Noel Hill, at the Willie Clancy Summer School, 2009. Photograph courtesy of Peter Laban.

At the same time, the efforts of many older-style players added greatly to this revival as well; it was due to their efforts that Irish concertina playing was kept alive during the lean years. These include not only those many players mentioned above, but also musicians like Kitty Hayes (1926-2008) of Fahanlunaghta, near Lahinch, County Clare, who took up the concertina after a forty year lapse and made several charming recordings (Figure 40). Tommy McCarthy (1939-2002) of Kilmihil County Clare (Figure 39) was expert on both the uilleann pipes



Figure 38. Concertina class participants, Eigse Mrs. Crotty, Kilrush, 2005. With thanks to Shay Fogarty.



Figure 39. The late Tommy McCarthy with pupil, Willie Clancy school, ca. 1995. With thanks to Tony Keurns, photographer, and the Irish Traditional Music Archive.

and concertina, was a student of Stack Ryan's in his youth, and taught many people his beautiful style of playing the instrument at the Willie Clancy Summer School through the 1990s. Gertie Commame (1917-2005) of Ballyknock, near Kilnamona in County Clare, was largely self-taught at a time when there were few musicians in his area; he was only recorded near the end of his long life. There are more of that generation, including retired blacksmith Tom Carey of Kilmihil and later Clanredden (Figure 41), a neighbor of Solus Lillis, who released a CD in 2009; the late Sonny Murray of Kilmihil and later Ennis, another who played with Stack Ryan and Paddy Murphy; Gerald Haugh of Lissycasey, a 1976 All-Ireland winner (Figure 43). All played a vital role in keeping the playing of concertina in the west of Ireland alive for future generations.



Figure 40. The late Kitty Hayes of Fahan/unaghta, near Lahinch, Co. Clare, in 2008. Photograph courtesy of Peter Laban.



Figure 41. Tom Carey, at the Willie Clancy Summer School in 2009. Photograph courtesy of Peter Laban.



Figure 42. The past and the future of the Irish concertina: the late Bernard O'Sullivan with grandson Devin, in 2008. Photo courtesy of Shay Fogarty.





Figure 43. Tom Carcy, Gerald Haugh and Tommy McMahon at the Eigse Mrs. Crotty, 2005. With thanks to Shay Fogarty.



Figure 44. The Tulla Junior Céili Band, 1970s. Mary MacNamara is standing third from the right, holding an Anglo-German concertina. Photo courtesy of the Tulla Comhaltas.

The older, less technical style that these players used has not disappeared among all younger players. Mary MacNamara, of Tulla in eastern County Clare, plays the concertina in a gentle and graceful style she picked up both from an older generation Tulla concertina player named Mickey Donoghue (Figure 25), of whom she said, "Mickey played in a very gentle manner, and I feel that I owe my present style to the many sessions as a young player with him."<sup>197</sup> Donoghue played a German concertina, which was the type first played by MacNamara. She acquired an Anglo-German concertina by the time she played with the Tulla Junior Céilí Band as a teenager in the 1970s (Figure 44). Her less adorned, simple and graceful style provides a counterbalance to the technical brilliance of Noel Hill, and clearly there is substantial room in Irish traditional music for a variety of styles today.

A large number of other new recording artists on the Irish concertina have emerged during the late-twentieth-century concertina and general Irish music revival, including Tim Collins, Mícháel Ó Raghallaigh, Jacqueline McCarthy, Niall Vallely, Gearóid Ó hAilmhúráin, Terry Bingham, and Cathy Custy. Still more with recordings in the new twenty-first century include those of players like Dymphna O'Sullivan, Florence Fahy, Edel Fox, Holly Geraghty, Jason O'Rourke, Claire Keville, Larry Kinsella, Kate McNamara, Aogán Lynch, Pádraig Rynne, Michelle Mulcahy, and Niamh Ni Charra. There are doubtless others who are not on this list, and in addition there are scores of professional-quality players active in local music and dance organizations or performing in clubs and festivals. Beyond that, the total number of Anglo players worldwide who favor the Irish style and repertoire surely numbers in the thousands.

The revival has seen a virtual explosion of new players of Irish music on the Anglo-German concertina, not only in Ireland but in England and continental Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand, and elsewhere. Many in some of those countries (especially in North America and Australasia) are either not aware or are only vaguely aware of the concertina's past in their own countries, and have instead become

complete converts to Irish styles and repertoires. Prominent players like Noel Hill, Mary MacNamara, Gearóid Ó hAilmhúráin, Tim Collins, and Edel Fox give workshops well beyond Irish borders—from Germany to Puget Sound—spreading both Irish traditional music and their style of playing it internationally with each set of students.



Figure 45. Edel Fox playing concertina at the Willie Clancy Summer School, 2009. She is one of increasingly many young women drawn to the concertina in recent decades. Photo by Peter Laban.

Irish concertina playing is now a global enterprise, part of the much larger global explosion of Irish music. As P. J. Curtis put it in 1994, when describing Irish traditional music groups:

*[They] have played to hundreds of thousands of fans of Irish music—many of them newly converted—on concert platforms from Houston to Hamburg, from Pittsburgh to Peking. [These*

groups] are but the tip of the iceberg, spearheading the ever-swelling ranks of musicians playing and performing Irish traditional music, thus ensuring a place for the music alongside all other forms of popular music today. Forty years ago all forms of traditional music, along with traditional singing and dancing, looked as if they were in grave danger of being added to the ever-growing extinct species list. Today . . . Irish music lives and thrives in a way unimagined by even the most optimistic of observers of the music during those dark, bleak days of the Forties and Fifties.<sup>198</sup>

Young buskers with concertinas may be commonly seen playing Irish music not only in Ireland (Figure 46) but at festivals and town squares across the world. Several new Anglo-concertina builders of high-quality concertinas in the United States, Canada, Germany, and Australia cater especially to the market in Irish-style playing, such as Wally Carroll in the United States, Frank Edgley in Canada, Jürgen Suttner in Germany, and Chris Ghent in Australia—a far cry from the situation of scarcity only four decades ago. A Montreal-based internet concertina site, <http://www.concertina.net>, has an international readership that includes hundreds of Irish music devotees, most of them not of Irish nationality. More than any other current genre of concertina playing, Irish Anglo-German concertina playing is driving the global revival of the instrument.



Figure 46. A most impressive feature of Irish concertina playing is its adoption by the young. Young buskers at Willie Clancy Week, Miltown Malbay, Clare in the 1990s. With thanks to Peter Laban.

## Resources

### Archives and documents

The Irish Traditional Music Archive, Dublin:  
sound archives, manuscripts and photographs of  
concertina players and other musicians:  
73 Merrion Square, Dublin 2, Ireland ,  
<http://www.itma.ie>.

Publications and research by Gearóid Ó  
hAllmhúráin on the concertina in County Clare:

*The Concertina in the Traditional Music of Clare*,  
PhD thesis, Queen's University Belfast, 1990.

*Clare: Heartland of the Irish Concertina*: Papers  
of the International Concertina Association, v. 3,  
2006.

*The concertina music of Paddy Murphy* (in four  
parts): Treoir, v13, 1981, no 4, pp. 18-19; v13,  
1981, no 5, pp. 29-31; v13, 1981, no 6, pp. 17-21;  
v14, 1981, no 1, pp. 17-20.

### Recordings of pre-revival players

Ireland is blessed with a number of commercial  
recordings of Anglo concertina players who were  
active during the latter part of the heyday of this  
instrument, or who were at least children during  
that time:

*William Mullaly, The First Irish Concertina  
Player to Record* (Viva Voce Records, cassette  
005). This is expected to be re-released soon as a  
CD by the Irish Traditional Music Archives, under  
the name *The Westmeath Hunt*, and will contain  
transcriptions of all his recorded tunes. Mullaly  
was from County Westmeath.

*Elizabeth Crotty, Concertina Music from West  
Clare* (1999, RTE Music Ltd, 225CD). Mrs Crotty  
(1885-1960) was from Gower, near Cooraclare,  
County Clare.

Junior Crehan and his mother Margaret "Baby"  
Crehan, are featured on *Junior Crehan (1908-  
1998): The Last House in Ballymakea* (2007,  
Clare College for Traditional Studies, CD012-JC).

*Paddy Murphy: In Good Hands* (Celtic Crossings  
CC2007). Paddy Murphy (1913-1992), of  
Bealcragga, Fiach Roe, Co. Clare pioneered a  
cross-row fingering style and manners of  
ornamentation that greatly influenced players ever  
since his time.

*Kitty Hayes: A Touch of Clare* (Clachán Music,  
2005) and *Kitty Hayes and Peter Laban: They'll  
be Good Yet* (2006) feature concertina player  
Kitty Hayes (1926-2008) of Lahinch, west Clare.

*Two Gentlemen of Clare Music* (Clachán Music,  
2006) features concertina player Gerdie Commanc  
(1917-2007) of Ballyknock, Kilnamona County  
Clare as well as fiddle player Joe Ryan.

*Sporting Nell* (Marce Music Co., CD52) features  
Tommy McCarthy (1939-2002), of Kilmihil Co.  
Clare, on uilleann pipes and concertina.

Many Clare players were recorded in the 1970s by  
Neil Wayne and Free Reed Records; these have  
been recently re-released as a set (*The Clare Set*,  
AnClar 06). Individually they include:

*Clare Concertina Styles* (FCLAR 06). Originally  
issued as *Irish Traditional Concertina Styles* in  
1977, this recording features Mrs Ellen O'Dwyer  
of Limerick, Sonny Murray of Kilmihil and Ennis,  
Paddy Murphy, Solus Lillis and Tom Carey of  
Kilmihil, as well as younger players Gerald  
Haugh and Michael MacAogain.

*Clare Concertinas* (FCLAR 02) and *Traditional  
Music of County Clare* (FCLAR 05) feature  
Bernard O'Sullivan (d. 2007) and Tommy  
McMahon. Both are from the Cooraclare parish in  
west Clare.

*The Flowing Tide* (1974, FCLAR 03) features  
Chris Droney of Ballyvaughan, County Clare.  
Other CDs released elsewhere include *Chris  
Droney: The Fertile Rock* (Clo Iar Chonnachta)  
and *Irish Dance Music* (Copley 5007, tape only).

### *The Anglo-German Concertina*

*John Kelly - Fiddle & Concertina* (1974, FCLAR 04), features John Kelly (1912-1989), a native of the Rehy district of west Clare.

*The Russell Family* (1974, FCLAR 01) features brothers Micho, Gussie, and concertina player Packie Russell (1920-1977) of Doolin, County Clare.

There are scores of recordings by younger players of the revival years to the present. A partial listing of the names of many of these newer recorded artists is included in the main text, above.

### **Workshops and instruction**

Willie Clancy Summer School: the first week in July every year, in Miltown Malbay.  
<http://www.setdancingnews.net/wcss>

Eigse Mrs. Crotty: concertina and other music classes in Kilrush, sadly discontinued in 2009.  
<http://www.eigsemrscrotty.com>

Noel Hill Irish Concertina School: week-long classes in Ireland and America.  
<http://www.noelhill.com>.

### **Tutors**

*The Anglo Concertina, Handbook of Tunes and Methods for Irish Traditional Music*, by Frank Edgley, <http://www.concertinas.ca>.

*The Irish Concertina*, by Mick Bramich; Dave Mallinson Publications, Cleckheaton, Yorkshire UK.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, *The Concertina in the Traditional Music of Clare* (PhD thesis, Queen's University Belfast, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> Tony Engle, 1975, liner notes to *Clare Concertinas*, Topic Records 12TRFRS501, London.

<sup>3</sup> A few standard references include Engle, 1975, *Clare Concertinas*, Topic Records 12TRFRS501; Joel Cowan, 1983, "The Concertina Tradition in Clare," *Concertina and Squeezebox*, vol. 1 no. 4; Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, "Concertina," in *The Companion to Irish Traditional Music*, Fintan Vallely, Cork University Press, 1999; Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, "Clare: Heartland of the Irish Concertina," *Papers of the International Concertina Association*, vol. 3 (2006).

<sup>4</sup> Michael Tubridy, "The musical heritage of Mrs. Crotty," *Dal gCais*, no. 10, (1990; Miltown Malbay, Ireland, 1991), pp. 81-91.

<sup>5</sup> Tommy McCarthy interview, in Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, *The Concertina in the Traditional Music of Clare* (PhD thesis, Queen's University Belfast, 1990), p. 166.

<sup>6</sup> Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, *Ireland Before the Famine* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1972), p. 182.

<sup>7</sup> Lawrence J. Cafferty, *The Irish Diaspora in America* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1976).

<sup>8</sup> E.G. Ravenstein, "On the Celtic Languages of the British Isles: A Statistical Survey," *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, vol. 42, no. 3 (1879), p. 584. Citation found in Wikipedia, *History of the Irish Language*. Note: A good map-based summary of the famine and its cultural aftermath in Ireland may be found at <http://www.irelandstory.com>.

<sup>9</sup> Francis O'Neill, *Irish Folk Music, a Fascinating Hobby* (1910; repr. Darby, Pennsylvania: Norwood Editions, 1972), p. 288.

<sup>10</sup> Much of this discussion on Regondi is taken from Thomas Lawrence, "Giulio Regondi in Ireland," (paper, University College Dublin, date unknown). Available online at <http://www.ucd.ie/pages/99/articles/lawrence.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> *The Wexford Freeman*, January 31, 1835. Citation taken from Lawrence, "Giulio Regondi in Ireland," University College, Dublin).

<sup>12</sup> *The Guardian and Constitutional Advocate*, May 8, 1835. Citation taken from Lawrence, *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *The Londonderry Journal*, June 9, 1835. Citation taken from Lawrence, *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Randall Merris, 2003, Instruction Manuals for the English, Anglo, and Duet Concertina: An Annotated Bibliography, *The Free-Reed Journal* 4 (2002): 85-118; available online at <http://www.concertina.com>.

<sup>15</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, (Dublin), September 25, 1841, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> John Sproule, *The Irish Industrial Exhibition of 1853: a Detailed Catalogue of Its Contents* (Dublin: J. McGlashan, publisher, 1854), p. 249.

<sup>17</sup> "Antient Concert Rooms," *The Irish Times*, December 6, 1859.

<sup>18</sup> Advertisement, *The Irish Times*, November 6, 1865. I have borrowed freely from discussions on the Forum of <http://www.concertina.net> for information relating to Scates, especially postings from Wes Williams, Stephen Chambers, and Goran Rahm in 2004.

<sup>19</sup> "English Concertina by Wheatstone," advertisement, *The Irish Times*, August 23, 1861, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Advertisement, *The Irish Times*, December 23, 1870, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> Advertisement, *The Irish Times*, January 3, 1877.

<sup>22</sup> Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, 2006, "Clare: Heartland of the Irish Concertina," *Papers of the International Concertina Association*, vol. 3 (2006), pp. 2 and 6. The sales to these families are documented in Allan Atlas, "Ladies in the Wheatstone Ledgers: the Gendered Concertina in Victorian England," in the *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle*, v. 39 (2006).

<sup>23</sup> Stuart Eydmann, *The life and times of the concertina: the adoption and usage of a novel musical instrument with particular reference to Scotland* (PhD Thesis, Open University, Scotland, 1995), available online at <http://www.concertina.com>.

<sup>24</sup> "London and North-Western Railway," *The Irish Times*, January 11, 1889.

<sup>25</sup> *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), June 8, 1872, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), November 5, 1872, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), July 27, 1872, p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> *The Irish Times*, February 2, 1902.

<sup>29</sup> *The Irish Times*, October 14, 1902.

<sup>30</sup> *The Irish Independent* (Dublin), June 30, 1908, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), November 1, 1921, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> *The Irish Times*, September 7, 1909.

<sup>33</sup> Garth Christian, ed., *A Victorian poacher: James Hawker's Journal*, (London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1961).

- <sup>32</sup> Randall Merris, "Instruction Manuals for the English, Anglo, and Duet Concertina: An Annotated Bibliography," <http://www.concertina.com>, and Stephen Chambers, personal communication to the author, 2007.
- <sup>33</sup> Scates advertisement, *Irish Times*, December 21, 1863.
- <sup>34</sup> Advertisement for R. O'Reilly's Music Depot, *Irish Times*, October 7, 1868.
- <sup>35</sup> Randall Merris and Robert Gaskins, "Calculate modern values of historic concertina prices," *The Concertina Library*, <http://www.concertina.com>.
- <sup>36</sup> George Jones, "Recollections of the English Concertina", with notes by Robert Gaskins, <http://www.concertina.com>. Also see Frank Butler, "Concertinas in the Commercial Road: The Story of George Jones," <http://www.concertina.com>.
- <sup>37</sup> Stephen Chambers, "Some Notes on Lachenal Concertina Production and Serial Numbers," *Papers of the International Concertina Association*, vol. 1 (2004), pp. 7-8.
- <sup>38</sup> Advertisement for John Bray's shop, *Irish Times*, December 26, 1863.
- <sup>39</sup> Advertisement for O'Reilly's Music Depot, *Irish Times*, October 7, 1868.
- <sup>40</sup> See Randall Merris and Dan Worrall, "Earliest known English Language German Concertina Tutor: Minasi's Instruction Book of 1846", 2005, <http://www.concertina.com>. Also see Randall Merris, "Instruction Manuals for the English, Anglo, and Duet Concertina: An Annotated Bibliography," <http://www.concertina.com>.
- <sup>41</sup> Stewart Eydmann, "The life and times of the Concertina," (PhD Thesis, Open University, Scotland, 1995), <http://www.concertina.com>.
- <sup>42</sup> Advertisement for the Round Room, Rotundo, *Irish Times*, June 27, 1868.
- <sup>43</sup> Professor Millar, *The Belfast News-Letter*, Friday, April 2, 1869.
- <sup>44</sup> "Ireland, From Our Correspondent," *The Times* (London), May 19, 1868, p. 10.
- <sup>45</sup> *Southern Star*, (Cork), September 24, 1904, p. 6.
- <sup>46</sup> Peggy Crotty, as interviewed in 1986 by Gearóid Ó hAllmhúráin, *The Concertina in the Traditional Music of County Clare* (Ph.D. Thesis, Queen's University Belfast, 1900).
- <sup>47</sup> Advertisement for G. Morosini's Warerooms, *Irish Times*, February 9, 1870.
- <sup>48</sup> Harry Bradshaw, "William Mullaly, The First Irish Concertina Player to Record," liner notes to the cassette tape of the same name, *Viva Voce Records*, no. 005.

- <sup>49</sup> Advertisement for Grand Bazaar, *Irish Times*, August 19, 1862, p. 1.
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- <sup>51</sup> *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), September 19, 1877, p. 2.
- <sup>52</sup> *The Southern Star* (Cork), December 3, 1892, p. 3.
- <sup>53</sup> Eliakim Littell, "Irish step-dancing, From Chamber's Magazine," *The Living Age*, Fifth Series, vol. LI, (Boston), 1885.
- <sup>54</sup> *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), June 6, 1877, p. 1.
- <sup>55</sup> Letters, *Musical News*, London, October 2, 1897.
- <sup>56</sup> Muiris Ó Rocháin and Harry Hughes, as interviewed in the article "Junior Crehan remembers," *Dal gCais*, vol. 3, 1977.
- <sup>57</sup> Gearóid Ó hAllmhúráin, 1990, *The Concertina in the Traditional Music of Clare*, PhD thesis, Queen's University Belfast.
- <sup>58</sup> *The Southern Star*, June 3, 1893, p.3, Cork.
- <sup>59</sup> The Kingstown Regatta, *Irish Times*, July 21, 1876.
- <sup>60</sup> *Irish Times*, August 29, 1878.
- <sup>61</sup> *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), September 10, 1873, p. 7.
- <sup>62</sup> *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), August 16, 1877, p. 7.
- <sup>63</sup> Passing events, *Irish Times*, September 26, 1904.
- <sup>64</sup> Letters, *Irish Times*, August 8, 1911.
- <sup>65</sup> "Beggings," *Irish Times*, July 27, 1925.
- <sup>66</sup> *The Irish Times*, August 17, 1928.
- <sup>67</sup> "Great Temperance Demonstration," *The Irish Times* (Dublin), August 22, 1860, p. 1.
- <sup>68</sup> *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), January 21, 1873, p.3.
- <sup>69</sup> "The Salvation Army in Dublin," *The Irish Times* (Dublin), June 22, 1882.
- <sup>70</sup> "The Police and the Salvation Army," *The Irish Times* (Dublin), May 10, 1900.
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- <sup>72</sup> Fintan Valley, "Step dance," *The Companion to Traditional Irish Music* (Crosses Green: Cork University Press, 1999).
- <sup>73</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>74</sup> Francis O'Neill, *Irish Folk Music, a Fascinating Hobby* (1910; repr. Darby, Pennsylvania: Norwood Editions, 1972), pp. 297-298.
- <sup>75</sup> Frank Maginnis, Joan Flett and Chirs Brady, *Kate Hughes' Dancing Book, Dundalk, 1867* (online at [www.chrisbrady.itgo.com/dance/dundalk](http://www.chrisbrady.itgo.com/dance/dundalk), 2002).
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<sup>81</sup> An Englishman, *Walking Tour Around Ireland* (London: Spottiswoods & Co., 1867), p. 92.

<sup>82</sup> Frank Maginnis, Joan Flett and Chirs Brady, *Kate Hughes' Dancing Book, Dundalk, 1867* (online at [www.chrisbrady.itgo.com/dance/dundalk](http://www.chrisbrady.itgo.com/dance/dundalk), 2002).

<sup>83</sup> Rev. Mark O'Byrne, *Thundher an' Turf* (M. H. Gill & Son, Dublin, 1917), p. 65.

<sup>84</sup> Helen Brennan, *The Story of Irish Dance* (Dingle: Mount Eagle Publications, 1999), p. 93.

<sup>85</sup> Fintan Vallely, "Dance Halls Act," *The Companion to Traditional Irish Music* (Crosses Green: Cork University Press, 1999).

<sup>86</sup> Fintan Vallely, "Set Dance," *The Companion to Traditional Irish Music*, Cork University Press.

<sup>87</sup> *The Irish Times*, December 29, 1870.

<sup>88</sup> "The Woodford Eviction Riots," *Irish Times*, December 23, 1886.

<sup>89</sup> H.V. Morton, *In Search of Ireland* (London: Methuen and Company, 1930).

<sup>90</sup> Grace Orpen, *Dances of Donegal* (London: D. M. Wilkie, 1931), p. 7. A copy of this work is to be found at the Irish Traditional Music Archives, Dublin.

<sup>91</sup> Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, *The Concertina in the Traditional Music of Clare*, (PhD thesis, Queen's University Belfast, 1990).

<sup>92</sup> Cap, now usually written *caipín*.

<sup>93</sup> Boy, now usually written *buaichall*.

<sup>94</sup> Beaten.

<sup>95</sup> *The Southern Star* (Cork), August 5, 1893, p.2.

<sup>96</sup> Bernard Weaver, "The Franco-British Exhibition," *The English Illustrated Magazine*, vol. 39 (1908), p. 548.

<sup>97</sup> Donal McCartney, "From Parnell to Pearse," *The Course of Irish History* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1967), pp. 295-296.

<sup>98</sup> *The Irish Times*, April 14, 1886.

<sup>99</sup> Anonymous, "The revival of Irish Literature, and other addresses, 1894," *The Quarterly Review*, 190 (London: John Murray, 1899), p. 17.

<sup>100</sup> *The Anglo-Celt* (Cavan), April 18, 1908.

<sup>101</sup> Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, personal communication to the author, 2007.

<sup>102</sup> Francis O'Neill, *Irish Minstrels and Musicians*: (1913; repr. Darby Pennsylvania: Norwood Editions, 1972), p. 415.

<sup>103</sup> Barry O'Neill, "Introduction to the Reprint Edition," *Irish Minstrels and Musicians*, by Francis O'Neill: (Darby Pennsylvania: Norwood Editions, 1972).

<sup>104</sup> Grattan Flood, 1911, *The History of Irish Music*. As quoted by Barry O'Neill, "Introduction," *Irish Minstrels*, 1972

<sup>105</sup> Francis O'Neill, *Irish Folk Music, a Fascinating Hobby*, (1910, repr. Norwood Editions 1972), p. 288.

<sup>106</sup> Nicholas Carolan, *A Harvest Saved: Francis O'Neill and Irish Music in Chicago* (Cork: Ossian Publications, 1997).

<sup>107</sup> Francis O'Neill, *Irish Folk Music* (1910; repr. Norwood, 1972), p. 227.

<sup>108</sup> Tomas O Canainn, *Traditional Music in Ireland* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).

<sup>109</sup> Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, 1993, "From Hughdie's to the Latin Quarter: A Tribute to Clare Concertina Player Paddy Murphy," *Treoir* vol. 25, no. 2 (1993), pp. 40-44. This story was quoted by Nicholas Carolan, see Note 104, p. 56-57, from which I excerpted my own account.

<sup>110</sup> Noel Hill, personal communication to the author, 2007. As a contrast in musical potential of the earlier concertinas versus the later, Noel mentions the playing of John Kelly of Rehy, southwest Clare. Kelly was an extremely learned and proficient fiddle player, who would readily tackle complex tunes from the Coleman or Morrison repertoire. His concertina style however was much simpler, and reflected (according to Noel) the simple and straightforward way the older Anglo-German instruments were played in Kelly's youth.

<sup>111</sup> Francis O'Neill, *Irish Folk Music, a Fascinating Hobby*, (1910, repr. Norwood Editions 1972), p. 288.

<sup>112</sup> "Ireland, From Our Correspondent" *The Times* (London), May 19, 1868, p.10.

<sup>113</sup> T.W. Moody, "Fenianism, Home-Rule and the Land War," *The Course of Irish History* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1967), pp. 285-289.

<sup>114</sup> *The Southern Star* (Cork), September 28, 1895, p. 3.

<sup>115</sup> *The Irish Independent* (Dublin), May 31, 1905, p. 6.

<sup>116</sup> "The Woodford Eviction Riots," *Irish Times*, December 23, 1886.

<sup>117</sup> *The Southern Star* (Cork), October 30, 1897, p. 1.

<sup>118</sup> R. F. Foster, *The Oxford History of Ireland* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 202.

<sup>119</sup> "Drilling Prosecution in Clare," *Irish Times*, November 8, 1917.

<sup>120</sup> David Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life 1913-1921* (Cork University Press, 1998), p. 126.

<sup>121</sup> Austin Harrison, "Ireland," *English Review* (London), September 1917.



- <sup>122</sup> "The War in Ireland: Crime and Counter-crime, From our Correspondent," *The Argus* (Melbourne Australia), December 18, 1920, p. 10.
- <sup>123</sup> "Irish Rebels Foiled," *The Times* (London), August 8 1922, p. 6.
- <sup>124</sup> "New Year Eve in Dublin, Demonstration in the Streets," *Irish Times*, January 1, 1930.
- <sup>125</sup> *Irish Times*, August 17, 1880.
- <sup>126</sup> *Irish Times*, July 28, 1913.
- <sup>127</sup> "The 'Twelfth' Demonstrations," *Irish Times*, July 8, 1927.
- <sup>128</sup> R.F. Foster, *The Oxford History of Ireland* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 175.
- <sup>129</sup> Winthrop Packard, "The Modern Steerage," *The World Today*, June 1904. Found online at <http://www.kellsraft.com/Steerage/ModernSteerage.com>. I am indebted to Stephen Chambers for awareness of this item.
- <sup>130</sup> "Scenes of Grief and Joy: Emigrants Reception at the New York Boarding Houses," *Dallas (Texas) Morning News*, November 15, 1891.
- <sup>131</sup> Municipal Court, *Daily Cleveland Herald* (Ohio), November 2, 1866.
- <sup>132</sup> "Famous New York Men," *Kansas City (Missouri) Star*, February 4, 1888.
- <sup>133</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 2, 1880.
- <sup>134</sup> "The Irish Musical Union," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, December 23, 1894, p. 21.
- <sup>135</sup> Harry Bradshaw, "William Mullaly, the First Concertina Player to Record," in liner notes accompanying the Viva Voce recording (VV005) of the same name. Viva Voce recordings are distributed by Irish Books, 580 Broadway, Room 1103, New York, NY 10012.
- <sup>136</sup> Advertisement, *Irish Independent* (Dublin), December 19, 1929, p. 12. Billy Roberts was an occasional performer at the Tivoli Theatre in Dublin, as was reported in the *Irish Times*, January 30, 1923, for example.
- <sup>137</sup> "Dramatic," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, August 29 1876.
- <sup>138</sup> "Good Bill at Wirth's," *Omaha (Nebraska) World Herald*, October 22, 1899.
- <sup>139</sup> Alicia Nurminen, "Reminiscences of a Stewardess," *The Irish Independent*, May 15, 1946, p. 3.
- <sup>140</sup> Edwin James Brady, 1911, "Daly's Threshing," *Bells and Hobbles* (Melbourne: George Robinson and Co., 1911). Available online via the University of Sydney, at <http://purl.library.usyd.edu.au/setis/id/brabel>.

- <sup>141</sup> "Constable Casey, M.C." *Observer* (Auckland New Zealand), January 27, 1900, p. 23.
- <sup>142</sup> *Irish Independent*, September 18, 1907.
- <sup>143</sup> National Library of Scotland, online at <http://www.nls.uk/broadsides/broadside.cfm/id/16339>
- <sup>144</sup> "Famous Composer," *Salt Lake Herald*, December 24, 1907, p. 4.
- <sup>145</sup> "The Boating Disaster on the Shannon," *Irish Times*, August 18, 1893.
- <sup>146</sup> *The Meath Chronicle*, June 10, 1905, p. 5.
- <sup>147</sup> *The Meath Chronicle*, October 29, 1921, p. 4.
- <sup>148</sup> "Home Savages," *The Leisure Hour*, vol. 34 (London), 1885, p. 72.
- <sup>149</sup> *The Southern Star* (Cork), December 24, 1892, p. 5.
- <sup>150</sup> "Irishman Emulates God Pan," *Ogden (Utah) Examiner*, July 5, 1905.
- <sup>151</sup> "Tariff Tasks", *The Meath Chronicle*, April 7, 1923, p. 5.
- <sup>152</sup> *The Southern Star* (Cork), November 7, 1896, p. 2.
- <sup>153</sup> *Meath Chronicle*, August 19, 1899.
- <sup>154</sup> "Local and Personal," *The Southern Star* (Cork), July 15, 1911.
- <sup>155</sup> "Clonakilty Petty Sessions," *Southern Star*, November 11, 1911.
- <sup>156</sup> "The Monaghan Crom. Con. Case," *Irish Times*, February. 5, 1891.
- <sup>157</sup> "Labour Unrest, Wexford Lockout," *Irish Times*, September 8, 1911.
- <sup>158</sup> "The Way of the West," *Connaught Tribune*, December 29, 1928, p. 3.
- <sup>159</sup> Noel Hill, personal communication to the author, 2007.
- <sup>160</sup> Tony Engle, op cit, and Cowan, op cit.
- <sup>161</sup> Gearóid Ó hAilmhúráin, 2006, "Clare: Heartland of the Irish Concertina," *Papers of the International Concertina Association*, vol. 3, and personal communication to the author, 2007.
- <sup>162</sup> Gearóid Ó hAilmhúráin, *The Concertina in the Traditional Music of Clare* (PhD thesis, Queen's University Belfast, 1990).
- <sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.
- <sup>164</sup> Michael Tubridy, The musical heritage of Mrs. Crotty: Dal gCais, 1990, p. 84.
- <sup>165</sup> Noel Hill, personal communication to the author, 2007.
- <sup>166</sup> "Is the Piano a Thing of the Past?" *Irish Independent*, (Dublin), July 30, 1925, p. 6.
- <sup>167</sup> *The Irish Times*, September 19, 1927.
- <sup>168</sup> "Cruiskeen Lawn," by Myles na gCopaleen, *Irish Times*, August 17, 1949.

<sup>169</sup> Letter to Colm Tobin by Junior Crehan, 1989, in *Angela Crotty, Martin Junior Crehan, Musical Compositions and Memories*, published by Angela Crotty, 2007, p. 42-43; [angelacrotty@eircom.net](mailto:angelacrotty@eircom.net).

<sup>170</sup> "Rural electrification." and "Electricity Supply Board," online at Wikipedia.

<sup>171</sup> Noel Hill, personal communication to the author, 2007.

<sup>172</sup> Michael Tubridy, 1999, "Elizabeth Crotty (1885-1960)" in liner notes to CD of that name, RTE, Dublin.

<sup>173</sup> Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, PhD thesis (1990), p. 7.

<sup>174</sup> Stephen Chambers, personal communication to the author, 2007. Noel Hill also told me of a Nick Falvey who performed precisely the same role (I may have misheard Noel when he told me Mr. Falvey's name: "Ned" and "Nick" are very likely one and the same person).

<sup>175</sup> Noel Hill, personal communication to the author, 2007.

<sup>176</sup> *The last house in Ballymakea: Junior Crehan, 1908-1998*: MJC 1908, available at [itacrehan@yahoo.ie](mailto:itacrehan@yahoo.ie).

<sup>177</sup> Tommy McCarthy, as interviewed in 1986, by Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin. PhD thesis, 1990, pp. 168-169.

<sup>178</sup> Sean O'Dwyer, "The concertina in traditional Irish music," *Free Reed, The Concertina Newsletter*, No. 14 (1973), pp. 13-17.

<sup>179</sup> Richard Evans, ed., "Clem O'Neal, Anglo Player," *Concertina Magazine*, (Winter) 1982, pp. 7-10.

<sup>180</sup> Dooley Chapman, 2005, *Your Good Self*: Chris Sullivan's Australian Folk Masters, CD CS-AFM-001.

<sup>181</sup> Beatrice M. Hicks, *The Cape as I Found It* (London, Elliot Stock, 1900), p. 129.

<sup>182</sup> "Boer Courtship," *The Otago Witness* (New Zealand), November 6, 1907.

<sup>183</sup> not to leave out William Mullaly, of course.

<sup>184</sup> Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, PhD thesis (1990), p. 109.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

<sup>188</sup> Jackie Small and Nicholas Carolan, *The Westmeath Hunt: The Music of William Mullaly*, CD with transcriptions in progress, Irish Traditional Music Archive, Dublin.

<sup>189</sup> "Hitting the high notes," *Clare Champion*, March 18, 2005. Also see Joseph Green, An interview with Chris Droney: *Concertina and Squeezebox* magazine, v. 32, 1995, pp. 37-42.

<sup>190</sup> Frank Edgley, *The Anglo Concertina, Handbook of Tunes and Methods for Irish Traditional Music*, <http://www.concertinas.ca>.

<sup>191</sup> Peter Laban, personal communication to the author, 2008. The biographical notes on Michael Doyle are from personal communication with his daughter, Theresa Doyle, of Miltown Malbay. Michael Doyle was the author's grand-uncle.

<sup>192</sup> *The Russell Family of Doolin, County Clare* (CD): Free Reed Records, FCLAR 01.

<sup>193</sup> Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, 1986, *op. cit.*, p. 262.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 262.

<sup>195</sup> Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, "From Hughdie's to the Latin Quarter: A Tribute to Paddy Murphy (1913-1992)" Liner notes to *Paddy Murphy: In Good Hands* (CD): Celtic Crossings, San Francisco, 2008.

<sup>196</sup> Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, PhD thesis (1990), p. 185.

<sup>197</sup> P. J. Curtis, *Notes from the Heart, A Celebration of Irish Traditional Music* (Dublin: Torc, 1994), pp. 128-129.

<sup>198</sup> P. J. Curtis, *Notes from the Heart, A Celebration of Irish Traditional Music*, pp. 9-10.



## Chapter 4. The Concertina at Sea<sup>1</sup>

*Possibly the melancholy concertina may still be heard of nights on the ship's fore-castle, when the labor of heaving out or taking in coal is over; but never shall the hearty fiddler, perched upon the boom forward, be there listened again, nor the slapping of Jack's feet in a hornpipe, nor the sounds of a piano aft, with couples airily revolving on the poop whilst the curl of silver moon slides down past the awning, and the solemn respiration of the equatorial swell awakens a sound as of deep sighs from the dew-darkened canvas swinging softly in and out from the masts.*

— *Old Ships*, William Clark Russell, 1888<sup>2</sup>

### Introduction

A sailor with a concertina, playing a tune: surely one of the most indelible public perceptions of nineteenth-century life at sea. In the eyes of the general public, the concertina remains primarily a nautical instrument even though the instrument is not usually seen on ships today, and most current concertina players follow the path of Irish or English traditional rather than nautically themed music. In fact, many of these traditional musicians, including some with expert stature among current players, question whether that public perception has any validity whatsoever—in other words, that the enduring image of sailors with concertinas is simply a myth, born of Hollywood and Walt Disney.

This chapter examines the world of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century nautical life, looking for firsthand reports of the concertina's use at sea. Because concertinas, both onshore and offshore, largely disappeared from the scene after World War I, there is little information to be gained from living sources; any players from that time are long dead. We must look at the diaries, books, and newspaper stories left behind by those who witnessed this era. Because there are no sound recordings of sailors playing the concertina, whatever is to be learned about what sort of music they were playing must also come from these firsthand accounts. Fortunately, an enormous body of literature exists that describes life at sea during this period, and because a fair sampling of it has now become

digitally available, modern search engines can be put to the task. The concertina, like other instruments used at sea—and indeed like nautical music in general—was not of paramount concern to a typical nineteenth-century writer, and thus references to it are usually to be found as paragraphs in book-length narratives or diaries, rather than in brief, focused newspaper articles. Such narratives survive in great numbers, written by ship owners, sea captains, wives of sea captains, ship passengers, missionaries, explorers, naval officers, and of course, by the sailors themselves.

These writers reveal that the concertina was indeed commonly played (and much beloved) on a very wide variety of ships from the 1850s to the First World War—whaling ships, clipper ships, merchant- and passenger sailing ships, large schooner yachts, early sail-assisted steamers, commercial steamships, vessels of Arctic exploration, and warships of the British and American navies. In addition, some of the most widely known fiction writers of the time either commented upon the use of the concertina at sea, or included its powerful imagery in their novels. Fictional descriptions of its use by Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, W. Somerset Maugham, Robert Louis Stevenson, Joseph Conrad, and William Clark Russell closely correlate with the observations found in firsthand narrative accounts.

The concertina was primarily used at sea to provide music for dancing. When at home port, sailors played at dances for visitors and

friends; when in exotic locales such as the South Seas or the Arctic, they entertained native people with their music and charmed local women with polkas and waltzes. In Arctic Alaska, Canada, and Greenland, early-twentieth-century anthropologists and musicologists remarked upon the Inuit and Aleut peoples' frequent use of fiddles, concertinas, and accordions, as well as upon the proportion of European and American dance music that they played—all attributed to several decades of interaction with sailors on board whaling ships. When at sea, sailors played for shipboard dances for passengers, and (last but hardly least) for the step-dancing of each other.

The concertina was also frequently used to accompany singing. Such singing was most often done during evening slack time and involved both nautical songs as well as any popular songs of the day. Hymns were also common, not usually at organized church services as might be expected (although this was the norm perhaps on large naval ships), but in the forecabin. Such hymns were comforting to sailors experiencing the often disquieting solitude of the vast ocean, the loneliness of years away from loved ones, and the dangers of an uncertain voyage. What seems to have been almost entirely absent is the use to which the concertina is most often put by re-enactors today—shanty singing of work songs.

A most impressive feature of both nonfiction and period fiction accounts is the nearly always-positive treatment given the instrument—primarily a German or Anglo-German concertina—in written descriptions and reviews of the music it made at sea and the sailors who played it there. Accounts of the instrument as used onshore during this period were for the most part harshly critical; the music was thought crude and the players “those of the working class.” However, writers at sea saw the concertina in a completely different light and responded with more prose written about this instrument in its nautical setting than in all its many other guises during that era, be they classical, Irish, morris, or music hall.

This report emphasizes firsthand accounts, which are reported below in some detail. Where possible, photographs of the crew or the vessel are included to provide the present-day reader a feel for the people and ships behind the descriptions. Accounts are also given of the decline and disappearance of the instrument, of the reasons its history of use at sea was generally lost, and of the cultural factors that led to a denial in some quarters that its nautical use ever occurred. Some attempt is also made to suggest resources for period music more typical of its actual shipboard use, in order to assist re-enactors and others interested in recreating a sound that is long gone.

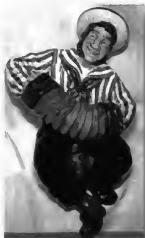


Figure 1. Ceramic figurine of sailor playing a concertina. Mid-twentieth century, English.

Table 1. Index of "sightings" where concertinas were observed on ships, by section

**The 1850s**

- 1854 *Allen Gardiner*: two-masted schooner, British operated, sailing from England to Tierra del Fuego  
 1855 *White Star*: three-masted clipper ship, British, England to Melbourne Australia  
 1859 *Maria*: three-masted Boston hark, American, Cork to Boston

**The 1860s**

- 1862 *Early Morn*: full-rigged ship, British, Natal to England  
 1862 *CSS Alabama*: three-masted screw sloop-of-war and raider, Confederate, Charleston to England  
 1862 *City of Manchester*: sail-assisted mail steamer, British, transatlantic  
 1863 *Great Britain*: three-masted sail-assisted steamship (originally six-masted), British, London to Australia  
 1864 *Essex*: passenger sailing ship, British, Melbourne to England  
 1864 *USS Nautilus*: hark-rigged steam sloop-of-war, American, blockade duty in Civil War  
 1865 *John Williams*: three masted hark, British, London to Australia  
 1866 *La Plata*: steam packet ship, British, England to Caribbean  
 1866 *Nancy Hanks*: fishing schooner, American, Maine to Grand Banks  
 1860s *HMS Royal Oak*: iron-clad frigate, British  
 1867 *HMS Juno*: wooden-hulled steam corvette, British  
 1868 *Selene*: schooner yacht, 275 tons, British, Glasgow to Mediterranean

**The concertina in the whaling trade**

- 1868 *Merlin*: three-masted bark whaling ship, American, New Bedford to West Africa  
 1884 *Lucinde*: two-masted brig, Danish, Denmark to Greenland  
 1899 *Esquimaux*: whaling steamer, British, London to Baffin Bay

**The 1870s**

- 1870 *Levina*: commercial schooner, British, Wales to Dublin  
 1870 *Yoang Australia*: three-masted ship, British-Australian, Australia to Fiji  
 1872 *HMS Excellent*: warship, British  
 1873 *Kelso*: bark, American, San Francisco to Liverpool  
 1874 *Britannia*: steam ocean liner, British, round-the-world voyage  
 1875 *Ellen Southard*: sailing lumber ship, British, tropics to Liverpool  
 1876 *Surprise*: brigantine, British, South Africa to London  
 1877 *Name unknown*: steamship, British, Liverpool to Jamaica  
 1877 *City of Chester*: sail-assisted mail steamer, British, Liverpool to New York  
 1879 *Suffolk*: steamship, British, West Indies to England

**A concertina-playing sailor, and African-American, first to the North Pole**

- 1878 *Katy Hines*: three-masted merchant ship. American, voyages to Far East, North Africa and the Black Sea  
 1891 *Kite*: steamship, American, Arctic Greenland exploration

**The 1880s and 1890s**

- 1880 *City of Brussels*: sail-assisted mail steamer, British, Liverpool to New York  
 1881 *Crown Prince*: passenger sailing ship, German, Germany to Galveston, Texas  
 1881 *Teuton*, steamer: British, Cape Town to Port Elizabeth  
 1882 *Name unknown*: Liverpool packet ship, British, Ireland to New York  
 1882 *Great Eastern*: passenger steamship, British, Cork to New York  
 1883 *Falcon*: 30-ton sailing yacht, British, Parana River and South American coast  
 1883 *Caledonia*: trading schooner, British, New Zealand to Samoan Islands  
 1883 *HMS Lark*: surveying ship, British, Solomon Islands  
 1883 *Name unknown*: merchant sailing ship, British, sailing in Sunderhunds off the Ganges Delta  
 1883 *Name unknown*: fishing trawler, British, North Sea

### *The Anglo-German Concertina*

- 1889 *Fortuna*: brigantine lumber ship, Russian, Russia to Newcastle England
- 1889 **Name unknown**: sailing yacht, British, New Guinea (Basil Thompson comment)
- 1884 **Name unknown**: sailing ship, observed from British steamer
- 1885 *Orient*: sail-assisted steamer, British, Portsmouth to Australia
- 1887 *Cypromene*: commercial three-masted bark, British, England-India-Australia
- 1890 *Traveler*: three-masted barquentine, British, traveling from Scotland to Spitzbergen
- 1891 *Kite*: steamship, Arctic Greenland, American
- 1894 *Dunard*: steamship, British, England to Brazil
- 1899 *Esquimaux*: whaling steamer, British, London to Baffin Bay

### **Concertinas and the Royal Navy**

- 1860s *HMS Royal Oak*: iron-clad frigate, British
- 1867 *HMS Juno*: wooden-hulled steam corvette, British
- 1886 *HMS Alexandra*: broadside ironclad steam warship, Mediterranean Fleet
- 1890 *HMS Immortalite*: Orlando class steam battleship, British, Channel Fleet
- 1890s *HMS Orlando*: Orlando class steam battleship, British, Channel Fleet
- 1895 *HMS Tourmaline*: warship, British
- 1899 *HMS Undaunted*: Orlando class steam battleship, British, Channel Fleet
- 1900s *HMS Isis*: Eclipse class masted cruiser, British
- 1907 *HMS Encounter*: steam battleship, British, England to Tasmania
- 1909 *HMS Vindictive*: steam battleship, British
- 1915 *HMS Harpy*: steam depot boat, British, observed at harbor on the River Stour
- 1916 *X152*: Royal Navy motor lighter, Suez canal
- 1917 *HMS Revenge*: battle cruiser, British, North Sea WWI
- 1927 **Name unknown**: battleship, British, Atlantic Fleet
- 1940 *HMS Wolfe*: armed merchant cruiser, British, North Atlantic

### **The concertina in the United States Navy**

- 1862 *CSS Alabama*: three-masted screw sloop-of-war and raider, Confederate, Liverpool dock
- 1864 *USS Nautilus*: bark-rigged steam sloop-of-war, American, blockade duty in Civil War
- 1898 **Name Unknown**: man o'war, American, Charleston SC harbor
- 1898 *USS Maine*: pre-dreadnought battleship, American, Havana harbor

### **1900 to 1920, and the last days of commercial sail**

- 1906 *Wavertree*: sailing ship, British, Plymouth to Vancouver around Cape Horn
- 1902 *Liverpool*: four-masted clipper ship, British, England to Australia
- 1903 *Cimba*: three-masted iron hulled clipper ship, British
- 1904 *Orinoco*: merchant sailing ship, American, New York to South America
- 1912 *Endurance*: three-masted barquentine, British, England to Antarctica
- 1919 *Juteopolis* (later *Garthpool*): four-masted bark, Cape Horn
- 1920s *White Star Dominion Line*: British, England to Canada, concertina used by Captain Thomas Jones

## A Compendium of Occurrences

### The 1850s

In October 1854, a two-masted, 88-ton schooner named the *Allen Gardiner* set sail from Bristol, England. Named for the founder of a mission on the Falkland Islands, this ship was built for the “Patagonian or South American Mission Society,” whose purpose was to convert the native inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego to Christianity. There are several accounts of this voyage, which is of interest as it is the earliest yet-documented use of a concertina at sea. After nearly a year in transit, the vessel arrived at Tierra del Fuego (Figure 2), and contact with the natives commenced:



Figure 2. The schooner *Allen Gardiner*, at Banner Cove, Tierra del Fuego, October 1855. From *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 1861.

*Sunday Morning, October 21, 1855. We entered Banner Cove, a charming place and first rate anchorage, being well-nigh landlocked. We had no sooner cast anchor than somebody cried out, "There they are—the natives are coming off!" All eyes were strained in the direction pointed out, and soon a canoe, with an old woman and three men, paddled towards us. . . . We beckoned for them to come nearer—an invitation they speedily accepted—and two of them were assisted up the ship's side. . . . They were delighted with the several trifles given to them, and the crew dressed the old man in a pair of trousers, tarpaulins and cap . . . They walked up and down the deck with Bunning, who was quite*

*free and humorous with them, and they wanted everything they saw. . . . They were remarkable mimics; whatever you said was repeated by them, and your actions closely watched and faithfully imitated. . . . [We] tried what effect music would have on them, the captain striking a few notes on the concertina; we afterward sang the doxology, to which they listened with much attention.*<sup>3</sup>

Another member of the party, W.P. Snow, recounted, “They did not like a looking-glass when shown to them, but the music of a concertina delighted them exceedingly.”<sup>4</sup> This reference shows that the concertina could indeed survive a long sea voyage, and moreover that its use at sea was not considered remarkable at the time. The mission was ill fated; four years later the vessel’s crew was attacked at harbor off the island and all but one perished at the hands of the native population.

Also in 1855 a three-masted clipper ship named the *White Star* (ex-*Blue Jacket*) was sailing from Liverpool to Melbourne, Australia, carrying six hundred immigrants. The *White Star*, at 2339 tons and 288 feet in length (Figure 3), was one of the fastest ships afloat in her day and became the first of the famed White Star passenger fleet. The passengers published an onboard newsletter, with the following announcement:



Figure 3. The British clipper *White Star*, ca. 1855. From an original lithograph in the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts; [www.pem.org](http://www.pem.org).



*The choir, composed of Miss Ford, the Messrs. Miller, Mr. Seward, the Messrs. Ford, &c, and accompanied on the concertina by Herr Kohler. [They] have greatly improved since they commenced singing together, and, last Sunday, chaunted the "Venite" and "Jubilate."*<sup>5</sup>

Herr K W Kohler appears to have been a passenger, and was the treasurer of the passenger's organization on that voyage.

In 1859 Kimble Bent, a young American who had joined the British Army in Ireland, became disaffected with this service and deserted by joining the crew of the Boston bark *Maria*. The ship was sailing from Cork to Boston when a fierce storm arose:

*[A]bout three hundred miles off the land a furious easterly gale began to blow, and the old barkey sprang a leak. Hove-to in the storm, all the crew could do was to stand to the pumps. The huge Atlantic seas came thundering on deck, and more than once washed the men away from the pumps. For six days and six nights they wallowed in the deep, all hands, sailors and passengers, taking turns at the pumps, working for their lives. All those terrible days of storm and fear the *Maria's* hands had nothing to eat but hard biscuits soaked with salt water. There was no place to cook and no means of cooking, for the galley with all its contents had been washed overboard. While the crew laboured at the pumps, the captain tried to cheer them up and put a little life into their weary bodies and despairing hearts by playing lively airs on his *concertina* and singing sailors' chanteys.<sup>6</sup>*

This is the only reference yet found of a ship's captain playing the concertina for a ship's working crew, and it appears to have happened at a time of particular duress. The narrator does not clearly state that the captain was accompanying shanties with the concertina as well—only that he played some tunes on the concertina and sang some shanties. The passage seems a bit odd because ships' captains are not typically known to have played tunes for a working crew; crews were a hard-case lot as a rule, and were unlikely

to respond favorably to a captain playing sweet music while they broke their backs on the pumps. It may well be that the captain played the tunes to boost the morale of the *passengers*, who were also forced to man the pumps. Or we could take this account completely as written, and accept the fact that it was a time of danger, and thus that extraordinary things could happen.<sup>7</sup>


Although these three sightings in the 1850s demonstrate that the concertina had arrived at sea, they do not clearly show that it was yet in the hands of sailors. In fact the references refer to instruments in the hands of captains and a well-to-do passenger, and arguably could refer to the relatively upscale and expensive English-system concertina. We know that inexpensive German-made concertinas were flooding the shops of England by this time, and that they were being played by many working class people, including a poor youth who eked out a living with his German concertina by busking on the London ferryboats in the early-to- middle 1850s (see Chapter 2).<sup>8</sup> Concertinas were being transported in bulk by clipper ship to far-flung places like San Francisco, which at the time was flush with cash from the newly discovered California gold fields (see Figure 4, from an 1855 San Francisco newspaper). These cheap instruments soon found their way into the hands of blue-water sailors, as the sightings in the next decade abundantly show.

## The 1860s

The earliest reference to a sailor's use of a concertina onboard was found in the diary of Frederick Cookesley, a missionary who purchased a berth in 1862 on the sailing ship *Early Morn*, bound for England from Natal in southern Africa. His entry for July 5 reads:

*Went down in the forecabin, and listened to a sailor playing the *concertina*. Had a pleasant conversation, discussing the increase of religious feeling amongst sailors, and the many spiritual advantages which may now be enjoyed by them.<sup>9</sup>*

**FOR THE HOLIDAYS.**



**ACCORDEONS,  
FLUTINAS,  
AND  
CONCERTINA S.**

**ATWILL & CO.**

**HAVE JUST OPENED A  
LARGE AND VALUABLE  
INVOICE OF**

**Flutinas, Accordions and Concertinas,**

From the celebrated maker, **FABER, of Paris.**

For sale at very low prices. Jobbers and country merchants are invited to examine the stock.

—ALSO—

**NEW TOYS,**

By the case, just receiving from clippers now unloading.

**ATWILL & CO.,**


del54f **172 Washington street.**

Figure 4. Advertisement for a new shipment of free reed instruments, including concertinas, from the San Francisco Daily Evening Bulletin, Dec. 18, 1855.

That same year, author Charles Dickens wrote a short story describing a scene that takes place in a bar in an onshore military neighborhood, in which a Royal Navy sailor purchases a concertina from two Jewish merchants.<sup>10</sup> The concertina was clearly finding its way to sailors.

A majority of the passenger ships in this era held dances whenever conditions were favorable. On the *William Tapscott*, bound from England to New York in 1859, one emigrant reported that there was “dancing and music every evening, with a very few exceptions.”<sup>11</sup> Some of this music was provided by the newly fashionable concertina. John McAllister, a Latter-day Saint passenger aboard the three-masted steamer *City of Manchester* (Figure 5) in 1862, recorded “saints on deck dancing, singing, knitting, sewing, etc. Violins and concertinas in full blast”.<sup>12</sup> They were British converts bound for Brigham Young’s Mormon outpost in Utah (see Chapter 9).

Steam Between  
**NEW-YORK AND LIVERPOOL!**  
CALLING AT QUEENSTOWN, (DOCK HARBOR,) IRELAND.



**THE LIVERPOOL, NEW YORK AND PHILADELPHIA STEAMSHIP COMPANY**

SCHEDULE OF PASSENGER SERVICE FROM NEW YORK TO LIVERPOOL AND VICE VERSA

NAME OF SHIP	CLASS	DEPART NEW YORK	ARRIVE LIVERPOOL	DEPART LIVERPOOL	ARRIVE NEW YORK
CITY OF LONDON	First	Dec 10	Dec 15	Dec 16	Dec 21
CITY OF MANCHESTER	First	Dec 17	Dec 22	Dec 23	Dec 28
CITY OF PHILADELPHIA	First	Dec 24	Dec 29	Dec 30	Jan 4
CITY OF NEW YORK	First	Dec 31	Jan 5	Jan 6	Jan 11
CITY OF BOSTON	First	Jan 7	Jan 12	Jan 13	Jan 18
CITY OF WASHINGTON	First	Jan 14	Jan 19	Jan 20	Jan 25
CITY OF NEW ORLEANS	First	Jan 21	Jan 26	Jan 27	Jan 31

Note: The above schedule is subject to change without notice. For full particulars, apply to the Agents and Agents.

Figure 5. Poster for the Liverpool, New York and Philadelphia Steamship Company, ca. 1860. The *City of Manchester* was one of its fleet.

As passenger ships became larger they were able to accommodate an increased number of passengers and crew, thus allowing the added luxury of such on-deck diversions as dances for passengers. Now a museum ship in Bristol, England, the *Great Britain* (Figures 6, 7) was the largest such ship in its day. Originally built as a six-masted, screw-propelled steamer in 1843, it was later converted to a three-masted, square-rigged steamer for the England-to-Australia run in the 1860s and 1870s. The crew took part in playing for dances, including the cook on an 1863 voyage who played concertina. Dances were done to the music of solo instruments; a fiddle, a concertina, and a set of bagpipes were aboard. The “Ship Log” of passenger Jonas Woodhouse provides a fairly detailed account of the musical evenings held during this twenty-one-year-old Yorkshireman’s 1863 passage from London to New Zealand:

*May 16. We Got up about 7 o'clock. The Sea very calm just like a sheet of Glass. Not a cloud to be seen in the Dark blue Sky. After breakfast a breeze Sprung up which carried us along merrily leaving a large Ship behind that had kept up on our larboard side the whole of yesterday. I also saw a whale blow to Day on our Starboard quarter. 2 also were seen in the morning by*



Figure 6. The *Great Britain* in its original six-masted configuration, ca. 1845. In its days during the 1860s and 1870s as an Australian emigrant ship, it operated with three masts and square-rigging. The illustration is from *Sailor's Language* by William Clark Russell, London, 1883.

Figure 7. This drawing of the deck of the *Great Britain* was captured by passenger Herman Zumstein on the same 1863 voyage where Jonas Woodhouse participated in dances on this deck. The drawing is courtesy of [www.TheShipsList.com](http://www.TheShipsList.com).



Figure 8. The Confederate sloop-of-war *Alabama* leaving the merchant ship *Tonowanda*, ca. 1862. Image courtesy of the US Navy Historical Center.

Figure 9. Captain Semmes and Lt. Kell aboard the *CSS Alabama*, 1863. Image courtesy of the US Navy Historical Center.



several. The 1st Mate was preparing a pole for his harpoon and so was the captain I suppose. . . . We pass the time in reading Books playing at cards dominoes and draughts etc or lying Sleeping all our length on the forecabin except it was our turn to cook or wash dishes or Scrape between Decks. . . . We had dancing on board this evening to the Bagpipes. Their was dancing on the poop to the *concertina* and their was prayer meetings going on at the same time in different parts of the Ship in the 2nd cabin and down in our place which I Suppose is to be carried on every Night.

June 4. . . . In the afternoon a fine breeze sprung up which continued all Night. . . . When the Sun Set we had a pretty Sky. I never saw so many stars in all my life. It gets very soon Dark after the sun sets almost at once. We had Dancing etc. to the *concertina* on Deck and on the poop. The piper was Displaying his talents with his pipes to which Music they had dances etc.

June 13. . . . was reported to Day that we was in the Same Latitude as the Island of St Helena. This Night was spent in Dancing Singing etc. The captain was down on the quarter Deck and gave us a bottle of Whisky. So that the fun was kept up till after 11 o'clock and was only stopped by a heavy Shower of rain falling so that we were all obliged to turn in to our Bunks. 2 of the passengers (young men) were tied up in the riggin.

June 29. Rose between 6 and 7 o'clock in the Morning which was splendid. Something like the same weather we have at home at this time of the year. In fact I think a little cooler. We saw an albatross to Day. This is a sign that we are approaching the cape. The wind increased at Night. It is Dark Now soon after 4 p.m. so that it is very wearisome between that and bed time. The cook has got a tamboreen made and was on the poop with it along with the *concertina* amusing the captain and passengers. We passed a barque away to the leeward to Day.

June 30. . . . At night we had a concert down in our place. The Performers were Bob Wotton and the cook. The entertainment consisted chiefly [of] recitations and N—r Songs. After ending with us they went up on the poop and performed before the captain and ladies their faces were blackened and the cook played the tamboreen and Bob the rattlers and harp they got very jolly at the captains expense. After that we had dancing and Swinging on Decks. It was a most beautiful Night as ever I witnessed not cold the Moon Shining Bright in almost a cloudless Sky.

June 16. . . . At Night the piper was playing on Deck the fiddler on the poop. Several of the young women Broke the rules and danced on Deck to the piper but was hunted away by the Matron.

July 28. . . . We were Not Making much progress for the wind was not steady at all and we had several Squalls and then the wind died away leaving us rolling on the waves. We had the pipes playing between Decks which was an awful Noise and gave me a headache. I went to bed after the prayers.<sup>13</sup>

On a similar voyage, that of the British ship *Essex* which sailed from Melbourne to England in 1864, a concertina was auctioned on deck by a shipboard "association" of passengers.<sup>14</sup>

The earliest reference yet discovered regarding the use of a concertina on a naval vessel dates from the early days of the American Civil War. The John Laird Sons and Company of Liverpool built the screw sloop-of-war CSS *Alabama* for the Confederacy (Figures 8, 9). While the new ship lay at anchor in Liverpool in 1862, a Union spy named William Passmore kept close watch on its preparations for a raiding trip. He reported that he "met the seamen . . . coming down Canning Street from the ship, playing "Dixie's Land" on a fife, concertina, and cornopeon [cornet], and they all took the . . . Woodside boat for Liverpool. They still kept playing "Dixie's Land" on the ferry boat."<sup>15</sup> The *Alabama* was active in various parts of the

Atlantic and Caribbean for the next two years, capturing and burning American grain and merchant ships. It was sunk off Cherbourg, France, by the steam sloop-of-war USS *Kearsarge* in June 1864, and its wreck was rediscovered by divers one hundred and twenty years later.<sup>16</sup>

The Union Navy also had concertinas on board, as in this account of a dance for visitors on board the USS *Nautilus*, a bark-rigged steam sloop-of-war, ca. 1864:

*The string band had played familiar airs, during the rambles of people over the ship, and they now began upon the list of dances. Lancers, quadrilles, minuets, waltzes, polkas and reels were danced upon the quarter-deck and greatly enjoyed by guests and hosts. . . . At intervals, one or more of the sailors danced a double-shuffle, a hornpipe, or a breakdown, with a great deal of flexibility; others sang nautical songs, played the concertina, the harmonica, the jew's harp, the flute, the flageolet or the bones, and two nimble fellows gave an exhibition of their remarkable skill with wooden broadswords, to the delight of the assembly.*<sup>17</sup>

Sailors of the Royal Navy were using concertinas by this time as well. In the 1860s, Seaman William Figg carried a concertina while serving onboard the iron-clad warship HMS *Royal Oak*, and later on the wooden-hulled steam corvette HMS *Juno* (built 1867). His Anglo-German concertina, built by George Jones, is in the collection of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich England (Figure 10).<sup>18</sup> George Jones was one of the first builders to use the Anglo-German keyboard; his shop was on Commercial Road in London in 1850. His grandson, Frank Butler, related that:

*This is (or was) the main road to the docks, and he did a considerable trade with sailors. Many called whenever possible, giving him unusual presents, some of which adorned his house after*

*retirement. I recall a rhinoceros foot which was used as a door stop, and a three foot long model in a glass case of a ship with steam and sails.*<sup>19</sup>



Figure 10. This handsome Anglo concertina, built by English maker George Jones, was carried by Seaman William Figg aboard the HMS *Royal Oak* and the HMS *Juno* in the 1860s. © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.

Glasgow music publisher John S. Marr & Sons sold instruction and tune books for the German concertina, including Marr's *Selection of Army and Navy Tunes for the Concertina*, as early as 1865.<sup>20</sup>

In 1866, Richard Tangye sailed aboard the *La Plata*, a steam packet ship bound from London to Jamaica, and described this twilight dance, with music presumably provided by the crew:

*The twilight is very short, but the moon, at this time very full, cast a pillar of silver light in the water that reminded me of Dunrobin. All on board, about a hundred and fifty people, were walking about, as there was to be a dance under the awning, to the music of a fiddle, concertina, and a pair of castanets and cymbals.*<sup>21</sup>

The *Selene* was a 127-ton schooner racing yacht, Clyde-built in 1865, which beat

several fast English schooners in the Cowes-to-Cherbourg race in her first year.<sup>22</sup> In 1868, the *Selene* traveled from Gourrock Bay, near Glasgow, to the Mediterranean Sea, and on the way out,

*The first night on board was spent in forecandle jollity. Billy Wren was elected chief fiddler, because he owned and played a concertina, to the disgust of Vallance, the fiddler from Skye.*<sup>23</sup>

On a pleasant evening later in the voyage, some musical festivities began that document the use of minstrel music on board. Minstrel music by this time had become a global phenomenon, and its music and dances contributed to the sailor's fun:

*The dog-watch was filled with festivities. Phil's concertina, and the fiddler of Dunvegan, gave great satisfaction. Charley the cook did "Joe Brown" upon a handful of flour dusted down in the n---r fashion. The hilarity was tremendous.*<sup>24</sup>

The dance was a minstrel show sand dance, where sand (or in this case, flour) was placed on the floor to facilitate sliding and shuffling, a precursor—of sorts—to the late twentieth century "moon walk."

Another type of schooner, the Maine fishing schooner *Nancy Hanks*, saw concertinas aboard at this time. During a quiet hour on deck while bound for fishing on the Grand Banks in 1866, eighteen-year-old sailor Ambrose Elwell described this scene:

*[O]ne of the Swedes got out his accordion and played some jiggy music to which several members danced. When the Swede was tired, the Searsport boy, I remember, gave us an excellent concert with a concertina which he handled with great skill, playing many of the melodies which are common along the Maine coast, including Smith's Hornpipe, Kendall's Reel, Drinkwater's Portland Fancy, which he rendered with such excellent time and spirit that we clapped our hands to the music and shuffled our feet in various steps as we walked about the deck.*<sup>25</sup>



Figure 11. The three-masted bark *John Williams*. From *The Sabbath Scholar's Treasury*, 1865.

In early January of 1865, a three-masted bark named the *John Williams* (Figure 11) sailed from Gravesend, England. A merchant ship, it was carrying a group of missionaries to the South Pacific Islands. It was not far into the Atlantic when it was met by a particularly strong storm, resulting in a concertina's use to accompany sailor's hymns in the forecandle that were being sung in thanksgiving for deliverance:

*Fear possessed all souls. Our captain, mate and all hands were on deck. All was excitement. Our ship fought nobly through the raging sea, and our crew, though now wearied and worn . . . managed her well. But the worst is to come, the gale increased . . . About 11 a.m. the waves were going clean over us. And to add to this, we heard that our whale boat, which had hung on good strong davits . . . had washed away. . . . If you have never been on a ship at sea in a gale, you can have no conception of our feelings.*

*At our wits end, we (missionary passengers) all met for prayer. . . . Whilst we were singing a hymn, just after we had done praying . . . the sun broke through. . . . It was truly an audible sign that our prayers were answered. You can understand me when I say it was a holy, impressive, and long-to-be-remembered occasion. Shortly after this, Mr Turpie passed through the saloon, and he told us they thought all danger was over. . . . On the Thursday*

evening . . . we (missionary passengers) had a meeting of thanksgiving. . . .

*We have a good captain and mate . . . and a crew that few ships can boast of. Poor fellows! I was sorry for them, and hope they will now get better rest. Last night, after prayers, when all thought they would be for bed, we heard music, and on going on deck I found it was in the forecabin, so, of course, I went fore. There they were all singing hymns, accompanied by the concertina. It was truly pleasant, and it did the heart good to see it.*<sup>26</sup>

As the concertina became more and more commonly found among sailors, it was perhaps inevitable that a ship would be named after it. The three-masted bark *Concertina* visited Boston in February of 1862, and Philadelphia in August of 1876, among other ports of call; it was active in merchant trade with Italy.<sup>27</sup> I have been unable to find other ships named after fiddles, banjos or accordions; the concertina was fast becoming a maritime icon.

### The concertina in the whaling trade

The concertina was commonly used by sailors in the whaling trade. The *Merlin*, a whaling bark from New Bedford, Massachusetts, was one of several whaling ships on which the wife of the captain sailed with her husband; these were known by sailors as "hen frigates." Helen Allen kept a diary during a four-year-long voyage (1868-1872), and as nautical writer and musician Robert L. Webb has recounted, she paid a fair amount of attention to musical details onboard the *Merlin* and other ships they encountered. During a close encounter at sea with the three-hundred-man crew of the British steam-sail corvette *Cossack* at a stop in the Comoro Islands off the east African coast, she heard "fine singing and flute playing last night. We are so near we can see and hear it plainly." After that encounter, interest in music on board the *Merlin* seems to have heightened, and Allen recounts the musical efforts of the crew in some detail. During the following month, she records that her

husband "has given the smallest accordian to Brazil, who is acting Cook at present, & Henry has sold his Concertina to Walter for three dollars. . . . Our men sing evenings."<sup>28</sup>

The usage of concertinas by whaling crews seems to have been both very frequent and long-lived, judging from the effects these whalers had on the Inuit and other native Indian groups they encountered in Arctic Alaska and Canada (note: period accounts refer to the Inuit as "Eskimos," a term now considered pejorative). Whaling vessels spent a great deal of time near Inuit and Aleut villages in the wintertime, when the whalers were frozen in, awaiting the spring breakup of ice and resumption of whaling. Anthropologist John David Hamilton, in a recent study of native people in Canada's Northwest Territories, observed that:

*The peak of the whaling industry came in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and Americans dominated it. Their relationship with the eastern Inuit was, on the whole, happy, and there were few instances of the debauchery that marked the Herschel Island whaler at the end of the century. As in the Delta, there were many sexual relationships between the races, and the Inuit adopted fiddle and concertina music as part of their culture.*<sup>29</sup>

Anthropologists found the same cultural influences in Inuit villages in eastern Greenland, as a 1923 study of the Ammassalik group noted:

*It is of frequent occurrence on the whole, that the Eskimo compose texts for the dance tunes they have learned from foreign seamen. The dances are accompanied as a rule by Eskimo players, who show considerable skill in the use of the violin and concertina.*<sup>30</sup>

A firsthand description of that cultural interchange is provided by the accounts of the 1899 voyage of the British whaling steamer *Esquimaux* (Figure 12) through the Davis Straits to Greenland. At the end of a visit to an Inuit village along the west coast, concertina music enlivened an impromptu celebration:

[T]he crew were allowed to go onshore for a final dance. . . . The crew returned to the ship at 10pm, with all the fair sex of the settlement at their heels. Something went wrong with the condenser [on the ship], so a *concertina* and violin were speedily at work on the ice, and dancing in full swing. I got up some races amongst the men and women, and gave scrambles for ginger nuts, tobacco, chocolate, etc. . . . All seemed to enjoy themselves immensely. The sun was behind the hill at midnight, and there were four degrees of frost while they were dancing on the ice. The natives have provided us with seven brace of ptarmigan, which are excellent.<sup>31</sup>



Figure 12. The three-masted British steam whaler *Esquimaux* along the Greenland coast. From *The Cruise of the Esquimaux*, by A. Barclay Walker, 1899.

In 1884 a traveler on the Danish brig *Lucinde* (Figure 13) in 1884, visiting the Eskimo village at Holstenborg, Greenland recounts a similar experience:

[I]n the evening I saw the *Lucinde*'s sailors come on shore and make straight for the schoolhouse, which in an instant was filled with young and old, women and men . . . With the exception of three musicians—two violins and a *concertina*—the men were rather a superfluous element, for they were not wanted by the young girls, who now were supplied with Danish partners, who kept swinging them about to the tune of "O Susannah" till late in the evening. Among the girls there were several of considerable beauty, and some were excellent dancers. These the

sailors seemed to appreciate, as they never allowed them to sit down for an instant.<sup>32</sup>



Figure 13. The two-masted brig *Lucinde*, basking in the Aurora Borealis off Greenland, 1884. From *Two Summers in Greenland*, A. Riis Carstensen, 1890.)

These interchanges left lasting effects. An article on Eskimo music in the *Journal of American Folklore* (1941), from ethnological research three-quarters of a century after the peak whaling days, lists several square dance (quadrille) tunes for violin and concertina which were introduced by sailors.<sup>33</sup> In the remote islands in Alaska's Bering Sea, seal-hunting Aleuts had similar interchanges with whaling and seal-hunting ships, and likewise picked up both concertina and songs learned from the sailors as this report from 1886 demonstrates:

The great feminine solace in a well to do native hut is recourse to a *concertina* or accordion, as the case may be. These instruments are especially adapted to the people. . . . The appreciation of good music is keen. Many of the women can easily pick up strains from our own operas, and repeat them correctly after listening a short while to the traveler or his wife playing and singing. They are most pleased with sad, wailing tunes, such as *Lorena*, the *Old Cabin Home* and the like.<sup>34</sup>

In another such encounter, Libby Beaman, the wife of a government agent on the remote Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea, wrote



of the following Aleut Christmas in the islands' tiny village of St. Paul, in 1879:

*The dancing and festivities have been going on ever since Christmas. The first night after Christmas, the school hall was thrown open for a masquerade dance. . . . As the week passed, more and more clever maskers appeared in the streets and at the evening dances. . . . Last night, a few of the maskers stopped at the house. They came with the two concertina players and the fiddler and danced for about fifteen minutes for us, then went elsewhere.<sup>35</sup>*

Numerous such accounts exist of concertina playing in the remote Inuit and Aleut villages of Alaska as well as in the Northwest Territories of Canada and Greenland. These support a general conclusion that it was interchange with whaling ships that brought the concertinas to the natives. At the same time, that same interchange provides evidence of the nearly ubiquitous occurrence of concertina playing among the whaling crews themselves in the late nineteenth century. The following is from a present-day Inuit website in Nunavut, the newly named northern province of Canada:

*Although most whaling in Hudson Bay was by American ships, there were also Scottish whaling ships, and some with crews from Portugal and the Azores. Whale hunting in Hudson Bay had a tremendous effect on Inuit. . . . They learned to play the fiddle, **concertina**, and accordion, learned Scottish round dancing that evolved and is enthusiastically embraced today as "square dancing." . . . there are many opportunities to square dance, especially at community events during Christmas and Easter. . . . Square dances may be done to pre-recorded music, but there are also many skilled accordion or **concertina** players in the community and the region. And, there are many people who play the fiddle. This music has its roots in traditions brought to the Arctic by the Scottish and American whalers who hunted the bowhead whales in Hudson Bay in the mid-1800s. People obtained the musical instruments by trading with the whalers and have*

*passed the traditions down in their families. Square dances here are not quite the ones those danced in the American west or in the prairie provinces; they also have roots in the old English or Welsh "round dances." Whatever the roots, they are great exercise as one dance can go on for 40 minutes to an hour or more!<sup>36</sup>*

Figure 14 shows an Inuit woman named Martha playing a German concertina for a group of young boys at Resolution Bay, North West Territory (now Qausuittuq, Nunavut), Canada in 1956. Most Inuit free-reed musicians today, however, play the button accordion rather than the concertina,<sup>37</sup> reflecting the same shift in popularity from concertina to accordion that occurred in the rest of global society from about 1890 on.

Such dancing of sailors with native peoples to the music of concertinas was not confined to Alaska, as this 1876 account of a dance in the Samoan Islands of the South Pacific indicates:

*In the evening, the Samoans envelope themselves in tappa, as the dews are very heavy, and stalk down like great ghosts from their own town to the vicinity of the saloons in the white quarter. There they sit or stand about in groups under the trees listening to the music—accordion and **concertina**—and watching the dancing, which is the certain accompaniment to sailor-life on shore. Strange and fantastic sights are to be witnessed at these revelries. At one end of the room German sailors will be indulging in their favourite "hop" waltz with flower-decked damsels, and at the other the native "dove dance" will be "coo'd" through by a bevy of dusky beauties. Here a sedate foreigner is pirouetting with a pair of tappa'd plebeians, and there Jack tar is scrambling through a polka with an untappa'd princess.<sup>38</sup>*

Figure 14. An Inuit woman named Martha, playing the concertina for a group of boy dancers, Resolute Bay (Qausuittuq), N.W.T. (now Nunavut), Canada, 1956. Until quite recently, concertinas were commonly found in many Arctic villages, as a result of 19<sup>th</sup> century visits by whalers. Library and Archives Canada, photographer Gar Lunney.



## The 1870s

The *Levina*, a commercial schooner from nearby Wales, was tied up in Dublin harbor in January 1870 while a murder inquest took place. An Irish sailor named Denis Kelly had died of suffocation in his quarters in the forecabin and had also suffered a broken nose. A ship's officer, who had been the last to see the sailor alive, recounted that "...when I went to tell them the night before to go to bed they said they would, as soon as they played out their tune on the concertina."<sup>59</sup>



Figure 15. The *Young Australia*, built 1853 and shipwrecked in 1872. The image is courtesy of the Brodie Collection, La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria, Australia.

On the other side of the globe, the year 1870 was a hard one in the Crown colony of Australia, and a number of Australians voyaged to the Fiji Islands to seek their fortune, colonizing it in turn. The three-masted ship *Young Australia* (Figure 15) was one of the ships used in this venture, and while it was at harbor in Rotumah, Fiji,

*There happened fortunately to be a concertina on board the ship, and this was brought ashore every evening by one of the sailors. First of all, the white men would dance a hornpipe or "break-down," then the natives would dance their own dances to their own wild music. Sometimes both parties would take hands and dance together, and then assuredly the measure*

*would be one of the strangest ever stepped by sane people.*"<sup>60</sup>

All was not well, however. The new colonists needed laborers to do their work and were not above enslaving native Fijians. This reportedly occurred with the assistance of a concertina-playing crew member, in one of the worst abuses of the instrument ever recorded:

*Masters and crews would not always be proof against the temptation of securing a large number of men at one "haul." What, for example, could be easier than to put the hatches on when a number of natives were eating beef and biscuit in the hold? Or, if some natives were too wary to come off, might there not be found ways to induce them to do so? If there was a concertina on board, it might be played as the vessel coasted along certain islands, and its Siren notes would be sure to attract a crowd of delighted and astonished natives. . . . Perhaps a dozen islanders would now come off—some swimming, some on surfboards, some in canoes. Meanwhile, the men would be busy in their own way. . . . the captain stands at the wheel, with a twinkle in his eye, and anon asks aloud, "Are you ready, men?" "Aye, aye, sir," is the universal response. Then, in a voice that rings through the ship, comes the laconic order, "Grab!"<sup>61</sup>*

What goes around often comes around, however. In San Francisco, California in 1873, the concertina was used in a similar fashion to secure workers, but this time the sailors themselves became the hunted ones, by "runners" whose employment involved providing a steady supply of sailors to ships:

*The sailor runner's principal inducement to Jack is a billet ashore where he can have all play and very little work. The bark Kelso, which sailed a few days ago, had all her men captured by runners, and among them a boatswain who played remarkably well on the concertina. . . . The boatswain got \$10 a week for playing the concertina to amuse the sailors in a [runner-owned] boarding house. . . . But the boatswain became disgusted with his occupation, and gave*

his "boss" the slip, shipping aboard a vessel bound for Liverpool.<sup>42</sup>

The practice of "shanghaiing" sailors was a sizeable industry along the San Francisco waterfront from 1850-1910, and occurred with a nod and a wink from corrupt public officials there. Targeted sailors were usually drugged in a waterfront tavern, boarding house, or brothel, and brought aboard unconscious. Their captors signed them on, typically receiving a signing bonus of three-month's pay from the ship's captain.<sup>43</sup>

By 1871, the concertina was considered part of the kit of the average sailor. Witness this description of "Our Seamen and Sea Captains," from a period British maritime magazine:

*In the foreign trades, in fine weather, during his day and dog-watch below, when his ship is well clear of land, he has many leisure hours which, if he can read, he wastes in the perusal of trashy novels, too often the only books to be found in a forecabin, save the tracts and magazines which the seaman's chaplain has put on board. Not infrequently the seaman is totally uneducated, and then playing at cards, building and rigging miniature ships, painting curious devices upon the inside of the lid of his clothes chest, tattooing his arms, making mats, practicing on his flute or **concertina**, idle talk and grumbling, occupy all of his spare time.<sup>44</sup>*

When the need arose, the captain or steward of a passenger ship would often put a musical sailor to work entertaining passengers as during this 1874 Christmas party on the deck of the *Britannia*, a successful early Cunard Line steamer (Figure 16):

*When the fireworks were over, we improvised a ball for the crew and the steerage passengers. The captain began the dance. The orchestra, composed of a **concertina** and a trombone, a new and most original combination, was placed under an enormous branch of mistletoe, hanging on a rope over the deck. Lying in our steamer-chairs, we enjoyed the merriment of those good people.<sup>45</sup>*



Figure 16. The Cunard Line pioneer paddlewheel steamer RMS *Britannia*.

Often, however, the celebration was more spontaneous, as described in this account of an 1877 trip from Liverpool to Jamaica on a West Indian steamship:

*After tea, at eight o'clock, if the weather is not bad, and the captain is in the humour for it, there may be some singing and dancing. Half-way between two ends of the ship a lamp is strung up, the passengers collect there, the spirit of merriment awakes, and the voice of song, the loud chorus, the bursts of laughter and applause, startle the drowsy swallows from their sleep at the mast-head, and the dreamy mermaids reposing in their shell caves at the bottom of the sea. If a great occasion, the steward comes out in full "Christy minstrel" dress, with banjo in hand, his face and hands negroified to the proper colour, and you get from him a number of pathetic negro songs and grotesque negro dances. During the evening, the captain's song, "John Barleycorn," is called for and given more than once, and no passenger who has any power of adding to the entertainment of the company will be let off by any apology whatever. The cook's or the cabin boy's **concertina** (the one or the other is sure to have one) is pressed into service, and the songs give way to dancing by those who can and will; whilst in the dim background of the light, spectators of the fun, you may discover the rough sailors from the forecabin, and the sooty faces of the firemen from the coal-pits in the regions far below.<sup>46</sup>*

Such minstrel music was very popular with sailors, as we already have seen from the discussion of the previous decade. The *Suffolk* (Figure 17), sailing home to London from Melbourne in 1878, was the scene of this minstrel band of crew members:

*The crew had formed a band of minstrels, and they often beguiled away many hours on board. One seaman had made a tambourine from a sheepskin given by the ship's butcher; another had an old concertina, another the bones and a triangle. Sailors like they at once consented to take part with their negro dances. So I christened them the Ocean Christy Minstrels.*<sup>47</sup>

The banjo became very popular on ship as a result of the global minstrel craze, and was often played with the concertina, as in this sighting on the *HMS Excellent*, a British warship, in 1872:

*There was no nook for quiet meditation where a seaman could be alone. Every place was public,*

*every place was noisy. Here is a group playing a forbidden game of cards under cover of a barrier formed of piled-up "ditty boxes," a mess kettle, and other un-shorelike obstacles. There is a man playing his banjo with his eternal tumma-tumma-tumtum. In another part is a concertina in full swing playing Jack's the Lad, while a score or more of step-dancers execute wonderful performances with their bare feet on the deck, their rough soles sounding like the rasp of a knife being cleaned on a brick-dust board.*<sup>48</sup>

Impromptu sailor's minstrel bands, also often called "foo-foo" bands, were quite common. Figure 18 shows a "foo-foo" band on a ship from the Aitken and Lilburn line (1873-1911). This line consisted exclusively of sail-powered vessels, which typically sailed from Glasgow to Melbourne but experimented with other runs, too.<sup>49</sup> The pictured band, ca. 1890, features an Anglo concertina, with an autoharp, harmonica, tin whistle, possible jew's harp, and bones.



Figure 18. Impromptu sailor's 'foo-foo' band, on an Aitken and Lilburn line sailing ship, ca. 1890. Note the Anglo-German concertina. © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.

Sometimes the entertainment would happen in the forecabin itself, as on board the Inman Line's *City of Chester* (Figure 19) during a passage from Liverpool to Philadelphia in 1878:

*Yesterday we paid a visit to the forecabin, sailors' quarters, two flights of steps leading to the apartment they occupy. Tiers of three bunks, one above the other, with rude tables in the centre, and benches ranged around. Though so gloomy and uninviting, here the jolly tar spins his yarn, and sings his song, one playing for us a jig on the **concertina**, while others danced. Only about two feet of space exist between each berth. "That's my shelf," Tom said, pointing to a remote corner, in reply to an inquiry.<sup>50</sup>*



Figure 19. The *City of Chester*, a passenger cargo vessel built in Glasgow, 1873. Image courtesy of [www.clydebuiltships.co.uk](http://www.clydebuiltships.co.uk).

Playing the concertina on board a ship sometimes had unusual consequences. The *Surprise*, a Sydney-based sailing brig, was in Port Natal in 1876, picking up a cargo of wool and hides, bound for London:

*[W]hile at the Port, she went within the bar to load, being a small vessel, and consequently was close to the bush. One evening, after her cargo had been shipped, while the crew were having a little jollification among themselves, one of the sailors, who happened to have a **concertina**, was playing various tunes for the amusement of his companions. It is supposed that the music attracted a "boa" [constrictor] on board, and*

*disturbed, it must have found its way to the hold, as the hatches were off at the time, and concealed itself among the cargo, as it was not discovered till the ship was well on her voyage home. . . it is about eight or nine feet in length. . . It has existed during the voyage on rats and other vermin . . . and now there is not a rat to be seen in any part of the vessel.<sup>51</sup>*

A shipwreck is an unlikely place to find evidence of concertina playing on board a sailing ship, but such is the case with the wooden full-rigged *Ellen Southard*, sailing with lumber from the tropics and wrecked off Liverpool in 1875:

*The Ellen Southard was laden with timber, and much of the cargo had been washed up on Crosby beach. Men were employed to draw up and save the timber. It was valuable salvage, for a plank of deal brings money in the market. The labourers engaged in the work saw two bodies floating in the tide. They looked at them and would not wade into the water to recover them. The corpse of a drowned sailor is not a marketable commodity . . . (A) hat, said to belong to the captain's wife, who was drowned by the capsizing of the lifeboat (sent to rescue the crew), has been picked up on the Crosby beach, together with a **concertina**, supposed to be the property of one of the crew of the *Ellen Southard*.<sup>52</sup>*



Figure 20. Wreck of the *Ellen Southard* lying on Crosby Sands, painting by G.S. Waters, 1875. © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.

As we shall see below, it would not be the last time that a concertina floated off a doomed vessel. The wreck is depicted in a painting made shortly after that event (Figure 20).

### A concertina-playing African-American sailor, first to the North Pole

As unlikely as it may seem, a concertina player was the first person to arrive at the North Pole, and the story begins on a sailing ship. In 1878, a twelve-year-old black orphan from Washington, D.C., ran away from his foster home and signed on as cabin boy for the *Katy Hines*, a three-masted American merchant ship. Young Matthew Henson (1866-1955) was tutored by a kindly ship's captain, a man named Childs. As Henson's biographer recounted:



Figure 21. Arctic explorer Matthew Henson, in his Arctic fur coat. Image courtesy [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com).

*They sailed together for six years, south around the Straits of Magellan and across the Pacific to the China Seas, eastward across the Atlantic and into the Baltic. Matt grew up during this time and learned first to read and write, then the skills of an Able-bodied Seaman. He learned to play the*

*sailor's instrument, the concertina, and developed a true voice. Despite the fact that he was the captain's favorite, he was popular with the crew and was content to remain aboard the Katie Hinds as long as she sailed.*<sup>53</sup>



Figure 22. The *Kite* in the ice at Melville Bay, Greenland, 1891. From Eivind Astrop's *With Peary Near the Pole*, London, 1898.

After the captain died, Henson left the *Katie Hinds* and worked at a variety of jobs before meeting a U.S. Navy civil engineer named Lieutenant Robert R. Peary. Henson then worked for Peary on a survey of possible canal routes through Central America before joining Peary's numerous voyages of arctic exploration. On these voyages, Peary and Henson mastered the Eskimo language, and learned to use dog sleds, all in preparation for an eventual attempt to reach the North Pole. The first of these trips was in 1891 on board the "dirty and greasy little whaling steamer *Kite*"<sup>54</sup> bound for Greenland (Figure 21), where the party set up a base camp at Wolstenholm Sound. At an Eskimo gathering in an igloo at a nearby Inuit village, the crew of the *Kite* participated in an evening of Inuit entertainment. After many lengthy Inuit songs and dances, Henson had a song of his own to introduce:

*Suddenly . . . Henson announced he would sing. He stood up, and all eyes expected to see him*

take the traditional sway and chant to the beat of the drum, but instead he walked over to a storage platform by the entrance tunnel and reached for the duffel bag he had inconspicuously placed there when entering. From the bag he removed his battered *concertina* and then resumed his place in the circle. . . . Their amazed chattering stilled when Henson began to sing and accompany himself. He sang the only songs he knew, the hymns he had learned as a child aboard the *Katie Hines*.<sup>55</sup>

Peary and his assistant Henson returned to Greenland in 1893, 1895, 1896 and 1897, surveying its north coast. Between 1902 and 1908 they made several attempts to reach the pole before successfully reaching it in 1909, using the USS *Roosevelt* as a base for sled-dog trips. During that long and arduous trip, many other expedition members fell back, and Peary chose his most experienced assistant, Henson, to be his companion for the final push along with four Inuit companions and their sled dogs. Henson (Figure 21) was much admired by the Inuits and Peary for his sled-dog and Inuit-language skills, and was especially useful to the expedition for his superb ability at dead-reckoning, as longitude and other directional sightings were very hard to come by. Henson, in a 1939 interview with broadcaster Lowell Thomas, recounted his approach to the pole:

*The morning of April sixth I found we were in the middle of hummock ice. I calculated about how far I had come, and I said to myself, "If I'm not on the Pole, I've crossed it, so I don't have to go no further." And I said to my Eskimos: "We're going to camp here. Make an igloo." Commander Peary was forty five minutes behind. He came up to us as we were building the igloo and he says, "Well, my boy, how many miles have we made today?" And I answers, "Too many, Commander; I think we crossed the Pole" So the Commander got out his notebook and figured a bit and he says, "I guess you're right."<sup>56</sup>*

Henson's memorial at Arlington National Cemetery notes:

*On April 6, 1909, two Americans and four Eskimos became the first human beings to set foot on the North Pole. The achievement crowned numerous attempts to reach the Pole, over a period of 18 years, by Robert Edwin Peary and Matthew Alexander Henson. On that historic day, it was Henson, an African-American, who first reached the Pole and planted the American flag.*<sup>57</sup>

Henson later recalled that this angered Peary. "Oh, he got hopping mad . . . No, he didn't say anything, but I could tell. . . . From the time we knew we were at the Pole, Commander Peary scarcely spoke to me . . . It nearly broke my heart . . . that he would rise in the morning and slip away on the homeward trail without rapping on the ice for me, as was the established custom."<sup>58</sup>

After they returned, Henson was denied a share in the glory, as were his Inuit companions; all honors went to Peary. The racial bigotry prevalent during that era and Peary's personal bitterness at being beaten to the Pole both played a part. Predictably, that was Henson's last trip to the Arctic. For the next three decades he worked as a clerk for the U.S. Customs office in New York, completely overlooked by history. He was finally honored by Congress in 1944, when he was given a duplicate of the silver medal that many years earlier had been awarded to Peary. He was later honored in meetings with Presidents Truman and Eisenhower before he passed away in 1955.



## The 1880s and 1890s



Figure 23. The Inman steamer *City of Brussels*, in dry dock in New York harbor. The image is courtesy of [www.clydesite.co.uk](http://www.clydesite.co.uk).

Dances prepared by the crew for the amusement of passengers continued to be a favored use for concertinas in the 1880s, as they had in the previous two decades. One such event occurred during an 1880 voyage of the Inman Line's sail-assisted steamer *City of Brussels* (Figure 23), en route from Liverpool to New York:

*Deck amusements have received a fair share of attention during the voyage, a most enjoyable one proving to be a hop on the starboard deck two or three evenings since. Our purser had had a sail hung across the quarter deck, and canvas along the starboard, forming a protection to the dancers. Lamps dangled from the rigging and aft bridge for purposes of illumination, and chairs were arranged on either side for spectators. The sea was calm and the evening warm, everything conspiring to add attraction to this favorite amusement. Stewards furnished music on a concertina and banjo suitable for square and round dances, the latter participated in with a*

*little difficulty. The evening's festivities closed at 10 o'clock with the Virginia reel, participants afterward retiring to the saloon for refreshments.*

*On this same evening the steerage passengers also devoted an hour or two to dancing on the deck forward, one of their number providing music on an accordion. The Germans assembled in a separate circle, taking part in games of hilarity, waltzes, and other German steps.<sup>59</sup>*

Dances also celebrated the safe arrival of sailing ships. The *Crown Prince*, a German passenger ship, had arrived in Galveston Texas in October 1881, with a full complement of immigrants bound for German settlements in Texas. A blow came up, delaying their arrival for several days:

*On Sunday (some city officials) went out to them, taking the first intimation to them of the blow on shore and the reason they were left for so long. When it was definitely known that the immigrants would be landed Monday, all parties felt greatly relieved, and Captain Maier, Sunday evening, proceeded to celebrate the fact by giving his passengers a treat. Beer was passed around and then the deck was cleared, a band in the form of a concertina and a hand-organ which played thirteen dance airs were brought out, and an evening given to enjoyment and pleasure, the city visitors, captain and officers of the vessel, all joining with the immigrants in the pleasures of the dance.<sup>60</sup>*

Shipwrecks were commonly reported in the media and provide additional "sightings" of concertinas on vessels of the time. En route from Cape Town to Port Elisabeth in 1881, South Africa, the English steamer *Teuton* struck a rock:

*Mr. Allen, a passenger, was on the poop deck with his wife...He was playing the concertina at the time the ship struck, and described the collision as more of a grating sound than an absolute concussion.<sup>61</sup>*

The crew placed some passengers on a first lifeboat but the *Teuton* went down before a second could be launched; 235 persons, including the captain and most of the crew, perished.

In 1889, a captain, his dog, and his concertina were all that was left behind on a wrecked ship in heavy seas:

*The Russian brig Fortuna, bound from Memel to the Tyne with timber, which ran aground on Berling Carr on Tuesday morning, is rapidly breaking up. The vessel had nine hands, including the captain. Five of them were saved by the rocket apparatus and three went ashore in the ship's boat. The captain . . . refused, however, to leave his vessel. The Alnmouth lifeboat went on Friday night to take him ashore, and lost five oars on the outward journey owing to the heavy sea . . . the lifeboat was compelled to return. Another attempt to rescue the captain on Saturday afternoon was unsuccessful. His only companion on the wreck is his dog. The fisherfolk say that they have heard the music of a concertina proceeding from the direction of the vessel.*<sup>62</sup>

Concertinas were to be found on board voyages to all sorts of exotic destinations. The *Falcon*, a 30-ton schooner yacht, sailed from England to South America in 1883; calm weather brought a treat even on small vessels:

*[W]e rewarded ourselves with a little dissipation in the way of an evening party. We brought out the Carlon wine and the concertina, and made merry. Don Juan sang us the songs of Spain and Italy, Jerdein gruff English sea-songs, and Jim even was brought in to give us one of the quaint French-Creole songs of his native island. This will give you an idea as to how we managed to divert ourselves when becalmed.*<sup>63</sup>

On a similarly small British trading schooner, the *Caledonia*, sailing from New Zealand to the Samoan Islands in 1883, passengers and crew totaled just nine persons, and yet there was music of a sort:

*Of course we have music aboard; what ship was ever without it? The very first evening Johnny, the boy, produced a dreadful moaning instrument, and for an hour, entertained us with a selection of most dismal tunes, which he said, as indeed seemed probable, he had learned by ear. At the end of the performance I went to him and hypocritically spoke in favourable terms of the beauties of the concertina. I need not have perjured myself, for he waxed very indignant, and glaring at me with his little peepy eyes as though he would wither me where I stood, he replied, "This ain't no concertina, it's a harcordium."*<sup>64</sup>

British New Guinea was a relatively late-established colony, and efforts were made to win the trust of the native people there. Mr. Basil Thompson remarked on an 1889 trip:

*Six years ago I had the honor of being a member of Sir William's first expedition to these islands. When we landed, it was always a question whether the natives, in their excitement, would use their weapons or not. We generally tried to overcome their distrust by playing upon their commercial instincts (giving them trinkets). . . . In another bay even this device failed, and we had to send on board the yacht for the mate to play his concertina and soothe their savage breasts.*<sup>65</sup>

In the nearby Solomon Islands in the early 1880s, a British surveying and scientific expedition of several years' duration utilized the *HMS Lark*. The expedition's work included studies of the songs of the Solomon native people, and one of the tunes was picked up by the *Lark's* crew for their own repertoire on the concertina:

*During our lengthened stay in the Bougainville Straits, we became very familiar with the popular tunes of the natives; . . . I have been able to reproduce in this work three of the commonest airs. . . . The first is a cannibal song and is sung at the war dances. Its words, as I learned from Gorai, the Shortland chief, are the address of a man to his enemy, in which he informs him of his*

*intention to kill and eat him. . . . The second tune, though not possessing words, is often sung or rather chanted by the men . . . in a fashion that sounded very abrupt to the white man's ear. The third tune is a pretty which the men of the "Lark" used to play with the **concertina** in waltz time. The words, accompanying it, have a music of their own.<sup>66</sup>*

In the lonely solitude of the open ocean, a concertina was usually close at hand. A British passenger bark was sailing en route to New Zealand in 1884, and had been out of contact with other ships for quite some time:

*The sixth Sunday, at ten p.m., when we were all but becalmed in the tropics, a ship came into sight, and in about three hours we were near enough to talk without the use of either black-board or signal flags. It was the first time we had exchanged a word with the outer world since leaving our pilot at Start Point. Presently the sailors of the other ship (there were no passengers aboard) began to play a **concertina**. We took the hint, and about twenty of our party went, at the suggestion of the captain's wife, to the side of the ship, and started some hymns for their benefit. . . . We were uncertain how much they heard, as the vessels were now slowly drifting apart; but the captain, who was on the poop, heard them encore the second hymn. They seemed, poor fellows, well pleased with our salute, and waved bits of sail-cloth in return from both rigging and deck.<sup>67</sup>*

English merchant seaman James Keane wrote in his memoirs in 1883 of an on-deck oyster feast for the merchant vessel's crew, sailing in the Sunderbunds off the Ganges delta:

*When the oysters began to pall, the captain or mate would tell the steward to bring out a certain well-known little polished oak bucket with brass hoops; then a little tin measure would circulate round the party. The cook would be asked to bring his fiddle and the carpenter his **concertina**. The boatswain would sing "Farewell and adieu to you Spanish ladies" . . . So the evening would*

*be spent, everyone contributing something. . . . They were jolly evenings, under the starlight in the temperate Indian nights.<sup>68</sup>*

Captains of vessels would often get together at port, and the concertina would usually be there, as in this account of North Sea trawling vessels in 1883:

*[The great resource on idle days is "cruising." A skipper anxious to be interviewed by his friends hoists a large flag at his mizzen-top. Boat after boat soon arrives, and there is a sort of banquet . . . in the cabin. The company is select, being limited to skippers and a few favoured mates; and the floor is spread with every available luxury. . . . The **concertina** is produced, and songs are sung, and there is any amount of discussion on the weather, the chances of the season, and the market prices. Indeed, a cruising visit is fully as pleasant in its way as an aesthetic afternoon tea.<sup>69</sup>*

Concertinas were frequently purchased onshore from ships' chandlers, and not all transactions went smoothly. In 1887, Second Officer W. Randall of the Calcutta ship *Cypromene* deposited \$5 for an \$8 concertina at a shop on Fulton Street in New York City (today in the area of the South Street Seaport Museum). When he couldn't raise the money for the rest of the purchase, the merchant charged him \$2 for his trouble, and the ensuing complaint from the sailor in petty claims court allowed the concertina to be "sighted."<sup>70</sup> The *Cypromene* was a British bark, built in Southampton in 1878 and placed in the England-Calcutta-Australia cargo trade.<sup>71</sup>

The late nineteenth century was a busy time for immigration to New York. As has been discussed above, the concertina was frequently played in steerage. There are many such occurrences—many more than should be injected here, as our main focus is the playing of crew, not passengers;<sup>72</sup> three accounts follow. In a Liverpool Packet Ship bound for New York in 1882, "It was soon discovered that one of their number possessed a concertina, and it was not long ere both he and his instrument were

requisitioned *pro bono publico* of the emigrants."<sup>73</sup> On the *Orient* (Figure 24), bound for Australia in 1885, both crew and steerage passengers play the instrument:

*Our chief steward, whose aim is to make everyone comfortable and happy on board, is full of fun. He can play upon his concertina, which he calls his little wife, many a merry air, sing a pleasant song, tell a tale . . . Some of the third-class passengers are trying to be merry. A concertina is being played, and several stout, buxom women are dancing an Irish schottische, and by their humorous words awaken cries of "Bravo!"*<sup>74</sup>



Figure 24. The SS *Orient*, which plied the England to Australia passage. The image is from *Bound for Australia on Board the Orient*, W. Osborne Lilley, 1885.

Finally, on a Cunard Liner bound for New York in 1897 there were numerous Scandinavian passengers:

*Each compartment of the steerage has a pantry for the accommodation of passengers . . . and the promenade allowed them on the upper deck is so long that five times around it gives a mile walk. As we passed through, one of the passengers was playing a concertina to which two or three couples were dancing, the girls with long fair plaits hanging down their backs, and small shawls over their heads. . . . Scandinavians always beguile the passage by music and dancing, and indeed, the steerage almost always offers an agreeable contrast to the first class in the matter of gaiety.*<sup>75</sup>

Concertinas were hardly the only instrument on board the passenger ships of the

day, as is made clear in this note from a voyage on the *Great Eastern* (Figure 25), sailing from Cork to New York in 1882:

*The number and variety of musical instruments in the ship was something extraordinary. From the organ and the grand piano in the drawing-room, to the concertina and bones on the lower deck, every noise-making machine that ever was invented appeared to be in constant operation.*<sup>76</sup>



Figure 25. The paddle steamer *Great Eastern*. This vessel laid the first transatlantic cable, in 1865-66. The image is courtesy of the US Naval Historical Center.



Figure 26. The *Traveler*, a bark employed in Arctic exploration, ca. 1890. The image is from *The Skipper in Arctic Seas*, Walter Clutterbuck, 1890.

The *Traveler* (Figure 26) was a British sailing bark traveling in Arctic seas between Scotland and Spitzbergen in or slightly before 1890. The following passage was written during a day of incessant and eerie fog, and draws the melancholy sound of the concertina into the image:

[T]he dullness of these foggy afternoons—when only mist can be seen all around, when there is not enough to amuse a kitten on deck, when it is most difficult to find anything that will tickle you, or cause a smile, when icicles constantly keep falling all around, out of the rigging, and the moan of a distant *concertina* from the galley for 'ard gives you a sort of little foresight of eternal wretchedness—is something terrible.<sup>77</sup>

The *Dunard*, a British commercial sailing bark, sailed in 1894 from London to Santos, Brazil, and then around Cape Horn to British India with a young sailor aboard named Vivian Wiles. While at port in Santos he wrote to his sister describing the port as being a rough place with open hostility towards the British. The crew would not go ashore alone, and when they did go ashore they went armed with knives and pistols.<sup>78</sup> Vivian Wiles and his fellow sailors changed the scene with a concertina and a smile. Wrote seaman Wiles:

*We had a jolly lively time of it here. We are laying four miles down river from Santos; it is among the mountains and it is all forest. There are a few (Brazilian) soldiers camping here and they are all negroes except the officers. We went down last night and played a concertina and tin whistle we had with us and it pleased the soldiers and they danced and shouted like mad and the officers, a major and captain, came out of their tents and asked us to sing some English hymns. They joined in and brought us cigars and port wine.*

*After we left the officers we went out to the soldiers and started them shouting and singing and dancing like mad. They put a long sword with a belt and everything on me and a helmet and started carrying me round the square. After a time we made a move to the ship and the soldiers ran after us with a bottle of claret from the officers; then they all shook hands and gave us some cheers because we had given them such a lively time.*

*On board they wondered what all the row was about and thought it was got up by me and Dan, the boy; but they made for the claret all right. I am good friends with all ashore now and get a warm welcome from the soldiers.<sup>79</sup>*

Numerous concertina "sightings" aboard Royal Navy and U.S. Navy vessels during the 1880s and 1890s are discussed in special sections below. Two other sightings of the 1890s include the American steamship *Kite* associated with Polar explorer Matthew Henson, and the British steam whaler *Esquimaux* (see above).

### Concertinas and the Royal Navy

We've seen above that sailors in the Royal Navy were carrying concertinas on board ships like the HMS *Juno* and *Royal Oak* as early as the 1860s. As mentioned earlier, writer Charles Dickens noticed the connection between navy sailors and the concertina in a short story in the journal *All the Year Round*, in 1862, with a description of a Royal Navy sailor purchasing a concertina from two Jewish merchants in a bar in an onshore military neighborhood.<sup>80</sup>

During the late nineteenth century, warships were undergoing rapid transformation. Steam had begun replacing sail starting in mid-century, and by the 1875 launch of the HMS *Alexandra*, it was strongly debated whether the ship should have sail at all (the traditionalists won, as Figure 27 shows). The *Alexandra* was the last British ship built with broadside-style armament below deck. Warships were getting larger, and with this greater size came larger crews, and more organized options for music onboard. On the *Alexandra*, a choir was formed for Sunday services and secular music. In the 1880s, Lieutenant Arthur Haverгал noted:

*Ships of a certain size are allowed a properly trained band. . . . They are taught two instruments, wind and string. . . . The duties of a band are to play in the evening, and sometimes during any heavy work, such as hoisting in boats, etc. . . . At this time also the men are generally*



Figure 28. Sailors of the HMS *Orlando*, ca 1897. An inexpensive German concertina is proudly displayed in the center foreground; by this time it had become a familiar icon of life at sea.

*cleaning guns and arms. So the band continues to play some lively and inspiring pieces, to render the work less irksome, I suppose.*<sup>81</sup>

With the growing organization and regimentation of the naval sailor's musical life, it might be assumed that the individual music made by sailors themselves might be on the decline. This was apparently not at all the case, again based upon Havergal's working experience with the *Alexandra* from 1886 to 1889:

*But the voluntary secular music takes place after the work of the ship and drills are over. The bluejackets like to congregate on the forecastle in the peace of the evening, and indulge in a clay pipe and perhaps a hornpipe and songs besides 'yarning and working.' They bring whatever instruments they may be the happy possessors of to play solos or improvise accompaniments. The concertina, banjo, guitar, piccolo, and sometimes a fiddle are the general favourites.*<sup>82</sup>



Figure 27. The HMS *Alexandra*, ca. 1885. The image is courtesy of the La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria, Australia.

The honored position of the concertina with Royal Navy sailors by this time is well depicted in Figure 28, where a sailor holding a German concertina is placed at the center of the picture. The crew belongs to the HMS *Orlando* (Figure 29), first of a class of "Orlando-class" warships. Even as the sails become vestigial components of these modern iron-hulled ships, the sailors clung to their traditional musical pastimes.



Figure 29. HMS *Orlando*, launched 1888. Note the much diminished size and number of the ship's masts relative to the earlier *Alexandra*. The image is from 'The Queen's Navy,' *The Navy and Army Illustrated*, 1897.

That the concertina was considered by the Royal Navy sailor as something personal and apart from the regular organization of the ship can be sensed from a poem written by Stewart Bowles, a sailor on the HMS *Tourmaline* (Figure 30) in 1895:

Boats!

Over in England nobody cares,  
W'y should they care for we?  
Up at the Admiralty nobody dares.  
Wot's the good of the sea?

W'en the sun's a-sinki" slowly over 'ome,  
An' there aint a breath o' wind to stir the sea,  
I gits my **concertina** all alone,  
An' I wonders wot in 'ell's the good o' me.

I wonders, does they know the work we do,  
I wonders, does they care 'oo draws our pay,  
'Cos, Lord! it makes you wonder,  
With 'er nose a-runnin' under,  
An' the gale a-comin' threshin' through the Bay!

—Written onboard the  
HMS *Tourmaline*, 1895<sup>83</sup>



Figure 30. HMS *Tourmaline* and HMS *Bacchante*, 1881. The image is courtesy of the La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Australia, Victoria.

The HMS *Immortalite* was another of the Orlando-class warships and part of the Channel Fleet. One day in 1890 the ship was opened to public inspection at Victoria Wharf near Dublin:

*In the afternoon an impromptu dance was got up by the men of the Immortalite on the upper deck, evidently meant for the pleasure of the visitors, the music being supplied by a concertina skillfully played by one of the crew. For a considerable time the sailors engaged in waltzes, polkas, schottisches, and other dances of that kind, acquitting themselves in a finished manner, and many of them exhibiting great proficiency in that accomplishment. The fun was immensely enjoyed by the ladies and gentlemen on board, and several of the officers looked approvingly on.*<sup>64</sup>

Figure 31, a French postcard from about 1900, depicts a very similar scene of sailors dancing to a concertina.

The HMS *Undaunted* was also of the Orlando class, and a member of the Channel Fleet in the 1890s. Admiral Lord Charles Beresford served as chief on that vessel and recounts this tale of a favorite Irish petty officer who put on a comic act with his concertina:

*Pat used to delight his audiences at the ship's concerts. He sang among other beautiful legends the Irish ditty, "Brannagan's Pup." He led upon the stage my bull-dog, who came very sulkily. It never could be (as Pat would have said) that the concertina accompaniment began when he began. When the concertina started ahead of him, Pat shifted the bull-dog's leash to his other hand, put his hand to the side of his mouth, and staring straight upon the audience, uttered the following stage direction in a furious whisper which was heard all over the ship. "Don't you shtart that ruddy pump till I hould up me hand!"<sup>65</sup>*

In 1900, a Royal Navy sailor was charged with stealing historical items of great value—Lord Nelson's watch and seal, and some other items—from the Navy Museum at Greenwich. The concertina played a role in hiding the artifacts, and it took a Scotland Yard detective to find them:



Figure 31. Postcard of sailors dancing to a concertina on the deck of a ship (French, ca. 1900). This fanciful picture closely resembles the reality on board the HMS *Immortalite* on a visitor's day in 1890. With thanks to Stephen Chambers.

*At Greenwich on Saturday, Wm. Alfred Carter, seaman, was charged on remand with being concerned in stealing and receiving about December 9, 1900, from the Painted Hall, Greenwich, a watch, a gold seal, gold box, enameled portrait . . . and other articles value 5,000 pounds sterling, the property of the Lords*



*Commissioners at the Admiralty. Mr. Williamson, who prosecuted, said that since the last hearing Chief Inspector Arrow [Scotland Yard] had recovered some of the missing relics—viz., the watch and seal. . . . They were found in a concertina, which was contained in a bag. . . . Chief Inspector Arrow, giving evidence as to the discovery of the watch and seal, said they were so concealed in the concertina that there was no rattle, and the instrument was capable of being played. After further evidence the prisoner was remanded.*<sup>86</sup>

This was not to be the only time the concertina was used in smuggling. An Irish customs guard recalled the following event, which occurred some time before 1923:

*An officer once told me that the most ingenious smuggler he had ever heard about was a tough old salt who always carried his concertina ashore after each voyage. One day an officer asked him to play a sailor's hornpipe. He refused. The officer then said he would play it. But the concertina was unworkable because it was filled with choice cigars.*<sup>87</sup>

The concertina continued to be popular in the Royal Navy into the early years of the twentieth century. The *HMS Encounter* was steaming from England to Tasmania when the postcard photograph shown in Figure 32 was sent in March 1907, with a note on the reverse side:

*This picture represents me in a Chinese "costume" exactly how they are worn. The two Banjo Players are my Vampers for the Concertina which is one of Jeffries Praed St. "London" 7 Guineas total.*<sup>88</sup>

Figure 33 shows the *Encounter* in the South Pacific, ca. 1915.

Sailor David Jacob Blazer joined the Royal Navy in 1902 and served on the *HMS Vindictive*, a steam battleship, around the year 1909. He played both mandolin (as in Figure 34, where he plays with a group of soldier musicians, one with an Anglo-German concertina) and

Anglo concertina. He was later to play concertina in an English music hall comic act called *Bright and Bright*.<sup>89</sup>



Figure 32. Sailor musicians aboard the *HMS Encounter*, March 1907. The costumed sailor at center holds a high quality Jeffries Anglo concertina. Photo courtesy Randall Merris.



Figure 33. *HMS Encounter* in the South Pacific, ca. 1915. The image is courtesy of Defense Australia.



Figure 34. Impromptu military musical group, ca. 1909. The sailor at back, with the mandolin, is David Jacob Blazer (1886 - 1940), who also played Anglo-German concertina on board the steam cruiser HMS *Vindictive*. The image is from [www.maxalding.fsnet.co.uk](http://www.maxalding.fsnet.co.uk).

In 1914, a sailing yacht named *Velsa*, cruising East Anglian estuaries, passed “forty or fifty” Royal Navy war vessels at anchor on the River Stour:

*It was necessary for the Velsa to inspect this fleet of astoundingly ugly and smart black monsters, and she did so, to the high satisfaction of the fleet, which in the exasperating tedium of Sunday afternoon was thirsting for a distraction, even the mildest. On every sinister ship—the Basilisk, the Harpy, etc., apposite names!—the young bluejackets were trying bravely to amuse themselves. The sound of the jew’s harp and of the concertina was heard, and melancholy songs of love.<sup>50</sup>*

The *Harpy* is shown in Figure 35.



Figure 35. HMS *Harpy*, ca. 1915. The image is from [www.smmonline.com](http://www.smmonline.com).

The last two decades before the First World War appear to have been the zenith, or perhaps the Indian summer, of concertina playing on Royal Navy vessels. By World War I, references to concertina playing on board British warships appear to decline very steeply. Here is one: The *X152*, a motor lighter, was being towed through the Suez Canal by a small coaster, the SS *Wheatbury*. The coaster’s crew invited Powell (of the *X152*) on board to conduct a Sunday evening service, so “with music, concertina, hymns books and Bible we spent what I believe to be an enjoyable hour and a half.”<sup>51</sup>

A bit later, in 1927, a concertina-playing sailor in the Royal Navy is on leave at Christmas:

*Christmas finds the ships of the Atlantic Fleet—battleships, aircraft carriers, cruisers, destroyers, and submariners—lying alongside the jetties and at buoys in their home ports giving the customary leave to officers and ships’ companies. The naval barracks are more or less denuded of their occupants. . . . Everybody is thinking of home, and when someone tries to organize an impromptu sing-song in the evening it is discovered that “Shiner” White, the expert performer on the concertina and ukulele, is away in the bosom of his family.<sup>52</sup>*

Such references are equally scarce for World War II. The HMS *Revenge* (Figure 36) was a 1913 battleship refitted for duty in WWII, and was active in the shelling of Cherbourg in 1940. Eric Sager was a stoker first class on board during those latter war years, and was renowned

for playing the concertina to entertain the crew.<sup>93</sup> The HMS *Wolfe*, a converted Canadian Pacific liner, also had a concertina player:

*All work no play applies too so we had a concert party which did a show every trip. Among our numbers were 2 who had brought their accordions, a couple of violinists and the lamp trimmer who played the concertina with one hand like a yo-yo, always a couple of comics and singers, after the show the wardroom gave us drinks, my drink was ginger ale then, so they did not incur tremendous costs on my behalf.<sup>94</sup>*



Figure 36. HMS *Revenge* during the Second World War. The ship was built in 1913 and refitted for use in WWII.

In the World War II submarine service, the late, well-known English Anglo concertina player Rev. Kenneth Loveless (once a pupil of William Kimber; see Chapter 2) reportedly played a Wheatstone 24-button instrument while on board.

The instrument is no longer particularly common in the Royal Navy. A fitting footnote to its use in the Royal Navy is this description of a concertina-playing sailor on an unnamed dreadnought, first published in 1915:

#### *The Mummers*

*The sun had not long set, and its afterglow bathed the bay in pink light. It was a land-locked harbour, and the surface of the water held the reflections of the anchored Battle-fleet mirrored to its smallest detail. So still was the evening that sounds traveled across the water with peculiar acute distinctness.*

*On the quarter-deck of the end ship of the lee line a thousand men were trying to talk in undertones, lighting and relighting pipes, rallying their friends on distant points of vantage, and humming tunes under their breath. The resultant sound was very much like what you would hear if you placed your ear against a beehive on a summer day, only magnified a million-fold.*

*The ship's company of a super-Dreadnought, and as many men from other ships as could be accommodated on board, were gathered on the foremost part of the quarter-deck, facing aft. They sat in rows on mess stools, they were perched astride the after-turret guns, on the shields of the turrets, clinging to rails, stanchions and superstructure, tier above tier of men clad in night-clothing—that is to say, in blue jumper and trousers, with the white V of the flannel showing up each seaman's bronzed neck and face. Seamen and marines all wore their caps tilted comfortably on the backs of their heads, as is the custom of men of H.M. Navy enjoying their leisure. Above them all the smoke from a thousand pipes and cigarettes trembled in a blue haze on the still air of a summer evening.*

*They were there to witness an impromptu sing-song—a scratch affair organised at short notice to provide mirth and recreation for a ship's company badly in need of both. It was a ship's company hungry for laughter after endless months of watching and waiting for an enemy that was biding his time. Their lungs ached for a rousing, full-throated chorus ("All together, lads!"). They were simply spoiling to be the most appreciative audience in the world.*

*"Private Mason, R.M.L.I. - Concertina solo!"*

*A great burst of laughter and cheering broke out from the sailors, and redoubled as a private of Marines, holding a concertina in his gnarled fists, walked on to the stage. Even the officers put their hands up to smile behind them; one or two nearest the First Lieutenant leaned over and patted him on the back as it he had achieved something.*

The whole audience, officers and men, were evidently reveling in some tremendous secret reminiscence conjured up by the appearance of this private of Marines. Yet, as he stood there, fingering the keys of his instrument, waiting for the uproar to subside, there was little about him to suggest high humour. He was just a thin, rather delicate-looking man with a grizzled moustache and dreamy eyes fixed on vacancy. His claim to notoriety, alas, lay in more than his incomparable music. Human nature at its best is a frail thing. But human nature, as typified by Private Mason, was very frail. Apart from his failing he was a valuable asset to the singsong party; but, unhappily, it required all the resources and ingenuity of its promoters to keep Private Mason sober on the night of an entertainment.

When and how he acquired the wherewithal to wreck the high hopes of the reigning stage manager was a mystery known to him alone. His messmates drained their tots at dinner with conscientious thoroughness, and his into the bargain, striving together less in the cause of temperance than from a desire that he should for once do himself and his *concertina* (of which he was a master) justice.

Yet, his turn announced, on the last occasion of a concert before the war, the curtain rose upon an empty stage. The Carpenter's party happened upon him, as archaeologists might excavate a Sleeping Bacchus or a recumbent Buddha, in the process of dismantling the stage. Private Mason was underneath it, breathing stertorously, a smile of beatific contentment on his worn features, his head pillowed on his *concertina*.

The Fleet Surgeon subsequently missed a large-sized bottle of eau-de-Cologne from his cabin, which he was bringing home from Gibraltar as a present for his wife. The discovery of the loss assisted him in his diagnosis of the case. Silence fell on the audience at length, and the *concertina* solo began. As has been indicated, Private Mason could play the *concertina*. In his rather tremulous hands it was no longer an affair of leather and wood (or of whatever material

*concertinas* are constructed), but a living thing that laughed and sobbed and shook your soul like the Keening. It became a yearning, passionate, exultant daughter of Music that somehow wasn't quite respectable. And when he had finished, and passed his hand across his moist forehead preparatory to retiring from the stage, they shouted for more.

"Church bells, Nobby!" cried a hundred voices. "Garn, do the church bells!" So he did the church bells, as the wind brings the sound across the valley on a summer evening at home, wringing his shipmates' sentimental heartstrings to the limit of their enjoyment.

"Strewth," ejaculated a bearded member of the audience when the turn was over, relighting his pipe with a hand that shook. "I 'ear Nobby play that at the Canteen at Malta, time Comman'er-in-Chief an 'is Staff was there – Comman'er-in-Chief, so 'elp me, 'e sob' like a woman." The reminiscence may not have been in strict accordance with the truth, but, even considered in the light of fiction, it was a pretty testimony to Private Mason's art.<sup>95</sup>

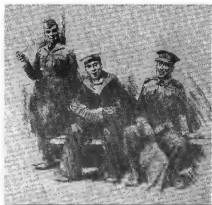


Figure 37. "The Silent Service," a WWI era illustration with a *concertina*-playing Royal Navy sailor. From *Concertina and Squeezebox*.

### The concertina in the United States Navy

The concertina appears to have held a position within the United States Navy similar to that which it did in the Royal Navy, at least from the 1860s to about 1900. We have already seen above that the concertina was played on ships on both sides of the American Civil War (1861-1865), including the confederate raider CSS *Alabama*, and the Union blockade sloop USS *Nautilus*; this occurred at the same time that Sailor William Figg was carrying a concertina on Royal Navy vessels.

There is little more documentation of this instrument on board U.S. Navy ships until the 1890s, when there are numerous sightings. An 1898 article entitled the "Making of the United States Man-o'-Warsman," noted that the trainees' leisure time was spent "playing cards, some in athletic games, some with concertina or violin, some in smoking or 'yarning'."<sup>96</sup> In another Naval training ship in a South Carolina harbor, it was noted that after an order was given, "away forward down in the recesses of the quarters, a

concertina stopped automatically in the middle of a plaintive note, and presently the boys came tumbling up."<sup>97</sup>

Figure 38, a lantern slide from that era, shows an American sailor playing an Anglo-German concertina along with other musicians; another sailor is dancing a hornpipe. In an 1898 newspaper article entitled "Jack Tar's Christmas Dinner," which described Christmas festivities on American warships in foreign ports, the musical program is described:

*Sometimes on ships having large crews, there is enough talent among the sailors to provide a very good theatrical entertainment. A stage is erected on the quarter deck, and the orchestra is formed from the ship's band. Songs and dances are the favorite turns, although sparring bouts and athletic feats are well regarded. Soloists on the violin, cornet, and concertina are always to be found on the programme, and the ship supplies electric light for the stage.*<sup>98</sup>

These festivities were occurring in ships that were on a war footing. On February 15, 1898, the pre-Dreadnought battleship USS *Maine* (Figure 39) was sunk by a large explosion of its munitions. A U.S. Naval Court of Inquiry determined the cause to be a naval mine that struck the ship near where the munitions were stored, although there has later been some inconclusive speculation that an internal coal fire might have ignited the munitions. At the official inquest convened in 1898 shortly after the disaster, it was noted that the last thing heard on board the *Maine* by observers on a nearby boat, before the explosion, was the sound of a concertina:

*Q There were some electric lights showing on board the Maine though, were there not?*



Figure 38. Sailor musicians and dancer, American Man O'War, ca. 1890. Note black sailor with concertina, far right. The stance of the dancing sailor suggests that he is dancing a hornpipe. With thanks to Stephen Chambers.

*A When we entered, yes; as we came up to our buoy there was a great deal of light. There seemed to be a good deal of moving about. We heard a concertina playing when we moored.*

The sinking of the *Maine* was a significant factor in the start of the Spanish-American War that followed.

This reference to the concertina on the *Maine* is the last “sighting” of a concertina yet found on a U.S. Navy ship. While concertina playing was relatively common on Royal Navy ships until after World War I, it may have become extinct somewhat earlier on American naval vessels.



Figure 39. USS *Maine*, 1895-1898. This photo, including the vignette of its captain, was published as a memento after the ship exploded in Manila Bay, Cuba, on February 15, 1898. Image courtesy of the US Navy Historical Center.

## 1900 to 1920, and the last days of commercial sail

Most large naval ships in both British and United States’ fleets had by now switched to pure steam or even diesel engines, and had small, vestigial sailing masts, if any. However, this same time period witnessed the last of the great tall sailing ships, in a last great hurrah for the days of commercial sail. The concertina was on board many of these vessels.

The *Wavertree* (Figure 40) was built on spec in 1885 in Southampton, England and eventually was sold to a Liverpool buyer. Large and iron-hulled, it was originally intended for the

jute trade with India. It is due to the good luck and the careful later research of Dr. Stuart M. Frank, Senior Curator of the Kendall Institute of the New Bedford Whaling Museum in New Bedford, Massachusetts, that we have the “sighting” of a concertina on board this ship from about 1906. Frank purchased a German-made, 20-button Anglo-German instrument in an antique shop in Victoria, B.C. (see photograph, below). It is of the inexpensive type that was popular with many sailors in the late nineteenth century. A scrap of paper stored inside the concertina, plus the story told by the antique dealer who sold it, served to demonstrate that the instrument had come from a musical instrument dealer (Moon and Sons) in the seaport town of Plymouth, England, and had been carried aboard the *Wavertree* by the sailor, whose elderly daughter had later sold it to the antiques dealer. According to the daughter, her father arrived in Victoria ca. 1900-1910. The records of the *Wavertree*, which is now a museum ship at the South Street Seaport Museum in New York City, show that it visited Victoria from 18 December 1906 to 14 January 1907, having arrived from Sydney, Australia. Three years earlier the *Wavertree* had sailed from Newcastle-upon-Tyne and come around Cape Horn. We know nothing about how Frank’s concertina was played, nor the name or background of the sailor—only that it was a sailor’s instrument on this square-rigger.”



Figure 40. The *Wavertree*, at rest at the South Street Seaport Museum, New York City. Image courtesy of [www.epnewyork.com](http://www.epnewyork.com).

A somewhat similar sighting was contributed by well-known concertina maker Colin Dipper, who once repaired a high-quality, Jeffries Anglo concertina that had been found on a beach in the Channel Islands in 1902 by a previous owner, immediately following the nearby wreck of the four-masted bark *Liverpool* (Figure 41). The concertina is presumed to have belonged to a member of the crew of this cargo vessel and is thought to have floated off during the storm that wrecked the ship.<sup>100</sup> The wreck was well known at the time, and had been both photographed and salvaged before it broke up on the rocks (Figure 42). Such a story might seem fanciful—perhaps a salvager lifted the instrument—except that just such an occurrence happened with the wreck of the *Ellen Southard* in

1875, described above, wherein a concertina that had belonged to a crew member had floated in with the tide. The high-quality Jeffries Anglo was not unknown at sea during this time period, as we have seen; a crew member of the HMS *Encounter* was photographed with one in 1907.

The next several instances have less information about the instruments themselves, but more information about their circumstances on board. The *Cimba* (Figure 43) was an iron-hulled, three-masted square-rigged clipper ship, 223-feet in length and 1117 tons, built in Glasgow in 1878. James William Holmes was master of this ship from 1895-1906. In his autobiography, he says this of music on this vessel:

Figure 41. The four-masted bark *Liverpool*, ca. 1902. The image is courtesy of the Brodie Collection, La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria, Australia.



Figure 42. Postcard showing the 1902 wreck of the *Liverpool* on Alderney, the Channel Islands. The concertina was found floating in the tide nearby. The images are courtesy of John Elsbury, New Zealand.



Figure 43. The *Cimba*. The image is courtesy of the La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria, Australia.



*[I remember] the crews on the fo'c's'le with concertina or banjo, singing the age-old songs of the sea, till their plaintive melody rolled across the sea from fo'c's'le to fo'c's'le, for sailor's tunes are always plaintive, however grotesque the words. . . . the dog watch was given up to whatever fun and jollity sailors could make for themselves. They could always make a merry noise with banjo, fiddle, concertina, mouth organ, kerosene tins and paper and combs. . . . outside friendly bouts with the gloves, I hold music to be the greatest aid [in dealing with sailor's tempers]. It is noticeable that a ship which could muster a concertina, a banjo, and a mouth-organ or two usually had a good-tempered crew.*<sup>101</sup>

The *Orinoco* was a sailing merchant ship that worked out of New York in the South America trade. While in harbor in 1903, the captain was interviewed by the *New York Times* about the piano he carried on board his ship:

*The captain displayed with pride a new piano presented by the owners, a beautiful piece of polished mahogany. . . . [He] explained that . . . the good effects of it were so apparent on his crew that the owners had decided to put them on all their sailing vessels, beginning with his. . . . "It is a rare thing now," said the captain, "to find a sailing ship without a piano . . . I invite my men to come into the cabin when off watch and make use of the piano. All sailors on a long voyage have much spare time that they don't know what to do with. They smoke more than is good for them. Some of my crew do that still, in spite of the piano, but the most of them are in the cabin whenever they can get there, singing and playing. They organized a glee club, I didn't. We have a man who plays the concertina, and another who can do wonders with an old flute that he bought in a South Street junk shop thirty years ago."*<sup>102</sup>

The *Endurance*, the ship of Ernest Shackleton's famous England-to-Antarctic voyage of 1914, was built in 1912 as a reinforced craft for exploration in regions with ice. It had three masts as well as a coal-fired steam engine. Prior to

leaving Plymouth on August 6, 1914, a photograph was taken of part of the crew (Figure 44), one of whom is holding a Lachenal Edeophone English-system concertina. Two months later, the *Endurance* arrived in Argentina, where this sailor was discharged; he did not make the final voyage to Antarctica with Shackleton.<sup>103</sup>



Figure 44. Crew of the *Endurance*, August 1, 1914. One sailor is holding a Lachenal Edeophone English system concertina. From the Concertina Library, [www.concertina.com](http://www.concertina.com).

Destined to become the last British commercial tall ship, the *Juteopolis* (Figure 45) was a four-masted iron bark, built in 1891 in Dundee, Scotland, for the jute trade between Dundee and Calcutta. John Williams served on that vessel, and in his autobiography tells of a 1919 voyage laden with Australian coal which was to be discharged in Chile and replaced by nitrate in the form of guano for fertilizer. By this time the Australian-grain- and Chilean-nitrate trades were about all that remained economically feasible for these large sailing ships. The bark had just arrived at the anchorage of Carrisal Bajo, Chile, leading to some quiet time for the crew and its captain:

*The sails were furled, the men came down on deck, some by the ratlines and others sliding down the backstays. Throughout the ship, a*





Figure 45. The *Juteopolls* (later *Garthpool*) under sail. The image is courtesy of the La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria, Australia.

cheerful air, "all night in," shore food, perhaps; and struggling with frozen rope and canvas, cold and wet, long nights on watch, over at last. The braces were manned and to the musical shout of the forehand man the yards were braced hard up on the backstays and the day ended.

After supper, I walked up and down the poop deck with the Old Man; heard a mouth-organ and singing in the half deck; a **concertina** forward, and well enough played at that. "Come down in the cabin, Master," from the Old Man, and down we went to a bottle of brandy and sat there for an hour or more. First, some talk of the voyage and then of the Captain's life at sea, forty-odd years, twenty of them Master of Cape Horners and in that trade for voyage after voyage. Thirty years married and in all that time less than three spent at home.<sup>104</sup>

The *Juteopolis* had changed hands several times in its early career and in 1920 was renamed the *Garthpool*. Nine years later it was wrecked off the Cape Verde Islands on a voyage from Hull to Adelaide in ballast. On board at the time of the accident was young Stan Hugill, later to become a well-known proponent of shanty singing and author of the shanty "bible," *Shanties from the Seven Seas*. On this last voyage of the *Garthpool* (and what has been described as the last voyage of a British deep-water sailing ship), Hugill played a role in teaching the crew shanties; many had shipped for the experience of working on one of the last Cape Horn ships. Hugill reckoned that his rendition of *Fire Down Below* was the last shanty sung at sea in a British square-rigger.<sup>105</sup>

The sighting of a concertina on the *Juteopolis* is of particular interest because of this later connection with Hugill, who began going to sea around 1923 or 1924. Stuart Frank reports Hugill to have said that he never saw a concertina on board a ship during his years at sail.<sup>106</sup> As will be seen below, concertina playing at sea had effectively died out by the time of the *Garthpool*. Had Hugill been able to go to sea just a few years earlier, however, he would have seen a concertina on board the same ship on which he had so famously served in 1929.

The concertina on the *Juteopolis* is the last documented occurrence yet found of a concertina on board a large sailing ship until recent times. Other sightings of the 1920s and later are very few. A ship's captain for the White Star-Dominion line in the North Atlantic trade owned an Anglo concertina (Figure 46) and there are the sightings on Royal Navy vessels in 1927 and 1940, respectively, described above. Beyond that, the record seems silent. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the concertina left with the last of the commercial tall ships; the reasons for this demise will be explored further below.



Figure 46. Anglo-chromatic concertina made by Lachenal. This instrument was owned by Captain Thomas Jones of the White Star-Dominion Line, which served the Canada-to-England passenger trade from 1909 to 1926. From the collection of the Merseyside Maritime Museum, Liverpool.

## **Analysis and Comment**

### **Sifting through the sightings: ships with concertinas**

The above material on sightings of concertinas at sea was collected mostly from books and secondarily from newspapers. All are firsthand accounts, and nearly all are available from digital sources. Because only a small fraction of what was published in the nineteenth century is available in digital searches, and because only a fraction even of that is available to be viewed in full, it is perhaps possible to treat the information so gleaned as a random statistical sample of a much larger potential narrative resource. By analyzing this anecdotal information as a population of similar events, we can get a better idea of some of the larger themes in concertina occurrence on board ships than is available by looking at individual anecdotes.

Sixty-seven firsthand sightings of concertinas on board ships are discussed above. A look at the distribution of these sightings by decade (Figure 47) shows that the peak years of concertina use were from 1860 to 1900. Usage started in the 1850s and perhaps even earlier. As we shall see below in a section on fictional literature, there are some fictional references from the 1840s that may reflect actual experience, although as fiction they have been excluded from the chart. Usage was dropping by the first two decades of the twentieth century and was low or nonexistent in the decades that followed.

It is instructive to look at the types of vessels on which these instruments were carried (Figure 48). Concertinas were played first and foremost on sailing vessels (dark gray). As steam power came into sea vessels in the 1860s, working sails continued to be installed in these ships, at first to aid in propulsion or in case of mechanical failure of the one steam engine on board (striped pattern). Later on, starting approximately in the 1890s, there was enough confidence in the reliability of these steam devices that vessels began to do away with anything but a small vestigial mast or two, which

were not enough for stand-alone propulsion on these pure steam or diesel vessels (stippled pattern). It was noted above that a sailor on the last large commercial sailing vessel in British registry, the *Juteopolis/Garthpool*, carried a concertina. The disappearance of concertinas on board commercial ships coincided with the disappearance of sail and sail-assisted steam vessels following World War I, and with some profound changes in musical fashion among the general public of the day as well (see Chapter 2).

The use of concertinas at sea predominantly occurred on British ships, and secondarily on American ones, as Figure 49 indicates. The word “British” here refers to the British Empire, of course; many of these ships served (and in some cases were owned by companies in) crown colonies in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Canada, to say nothing of Ireland. Three of the sightings are of vessels from non-English-speaking countries, namely one each from Germany, Denmark, and Russia. Although the six-sided concertinas that constituted many if not most of the concertinas in the hands of sailors were German-made (see discussion below), available information indicates that Germans themselves preferred larger, square-ended Chemnitz, Carlsfeld, and Bandoneon models that are often called accordions in period literature; in Germany, the smaller six-sided, two-row instruments were chiefly made for export.

Most of the vessels carrying concertinas were commercial, carrying cargo and passengers, or were engaged in fishing or whaling (Figure 50). The navies of Great Britain and the U.S. also extensively carried them, as we have seen. Because passengers, naval officers, and sailors tend to write much more about their experiences than whalers, fishermen, and merchant marine sailors do, it is probable that occurrences of concertinas on commercial ships are relatively under-reported.

### Sightings in Non-fiction Literature of Concertinas On Ships

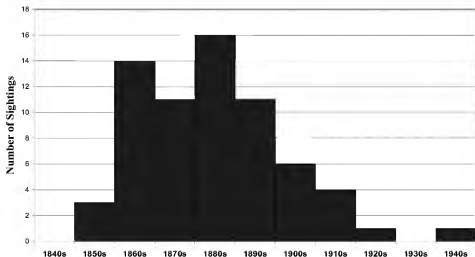


Figure 47. Sightings from non-fiction literature of concertinas on ships, 1840s-1940s.

### Means of Propulsion, Vessels With Concertinas

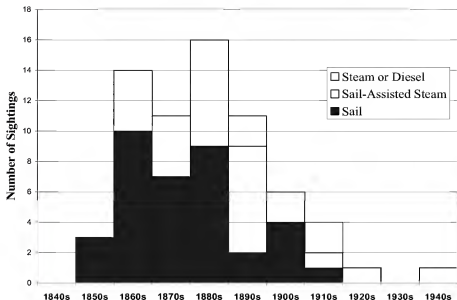


Figure 48. Means of propulsion for ships on which concertinas were sighted, 1840s-1940s.

### Nationality of Ships With Concertina Sightings

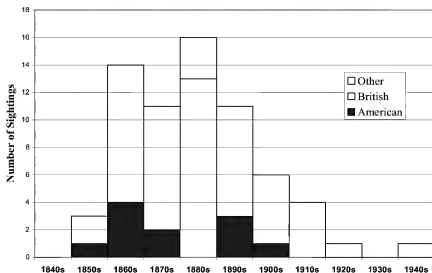


Figure 49. Nationality of ships on which concertinas were sighted, 1840s-1940s.

### Operation, Vessels With Concertinas

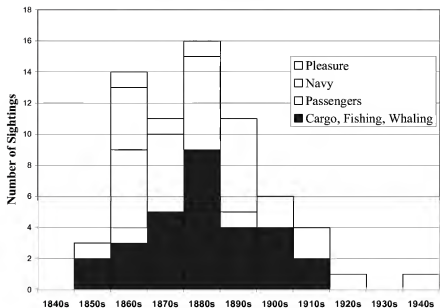


Figure 50. Type of operation of ships on which concertinas were sighted, 1840s-1940s.

## Types of music played on concertinas at sea

Of prime interest is what sort of music was actually played on these concertinas, and for what purpose. If one looks at recordings of nautical interest marketed today, one will see concertinas employed (where they occur at all) mainly in albums of sea shanties. Stan Hugill, the premier collector of shanties, took great care in pointing out that shanties were work songs used while working on deck in the days of sail, and that as such were typically sung unaccompanied, or at most, accompanied by a fiddle.<sup>107</sup> On the other hand, songs called “forebitters” were sung by sailors in hours off duty, when they could reach for a musical instrument. The concertina “sightings” above are congruent with Hugill’s experience (Figure 51) in that there are no references to shanty singing to a concertina accompaniment. The bulk of incidences of concertinas for song accompaniment are by sailors during dogwatch and other slack periods; one such song named is the old Didbin lament *Tom Bowling*. Not all were sea-songs, however. Anthropologists and other observers of Inuit life recorded the names of songs taught the Inuits by visiting whaling crews, including the Civil War favorite *Lorena* and the sentimental ballad *The Old Cabin*. Another key type of song frequently observed in these reports is the hymn, often sung by sailors themselves in their forecabin quarters in thanksgiving for deliverance from near disasters at sea, such as on the Boston bark *Maria* in the 1850s and the bark *John Williams* in the 1860s. Sailor Matthew Henson, of North Pole fame, sang the typical hymns *The Old Rugged Cross*, *Rock of Ages*, and *In the Garden* to some Greenland Eskimos on the occasion in the 1890s discussed above; Henson had reportedly learned these as a cabin boy on the *Katie Hines* in the late 1870s, and the narrative describes these hymns as the only songs he knew how to play on the concertina.

Perhaps the most significant interpretation allowed by the data, however (Figure 51), is that the predominant use of the concertina on board ship was to provide music for dancing. Nineteenth-century sailors played

for dances to attract the attention and favors of women on shore in places like Arctic Greenland, tropical Samoa, and at home port; for similar purposes (or pay) on board passenger ships; or simply to amuse or exercise themselves in solo or multiple-sailor step-dances, as we have seen. When playing for dances among themselves while at sea, they usually danced jigs or hornpipes. The description of a score of barefoot sailors dancing the hornpipe to the tune *Jack’s the Lad*, on the HMS *Excellent* in 1872, is a standout sighting in this regard, as is the photograph of the sailor dancing a (possible) hornpipe on board a U.S. Man O’War ca. 1890 (Figure 38).

Documents show that sailors, when playing for dances at harbor or for passengers, favored the prevalent ballroom dances of that period (see discussion, Chapters 2 and 3). These included galops, schottisches, quadrilles, waltzes, and polkas (the latter a noted favorite of sailors). The description of a ball on board the USS *Nautilus* in 1864, discussed above, provides a good record of the types of dances used in such an event. This situation contrasts with the mix of tunes that are played by most Irish-influenced traditional bands today, which concentrate on jigs and reels—something of which nautical reenactment groups should take note (see Resources section at the end of this chapter). Moreover, minstrel music had a strong following among sailors. Concertinas were frequently heard, with banjos, playing tunes from the minstrel tradition such as *Oh Susanna!*, played for dancing on the Danish brig *Lucinde* in 1884; sailor dancing on the British schooner-yacht *Selene* in 1868; and dances on the London-to-Melbourne passenger ship *Suffolk* in 1878. Other specific dance tune names noted on board (records are very sparse indeed) include *Smith’s Hornpipe*, *Kendall’s Reel*, *Drinkwater’s Portland Fancy* aboard an 1860s American ship; these were described there as locally played tunes. It is very likely that dance music closely mirrored the tunes then fashionable on shore.

## Music Played on Shipboard Concertinas

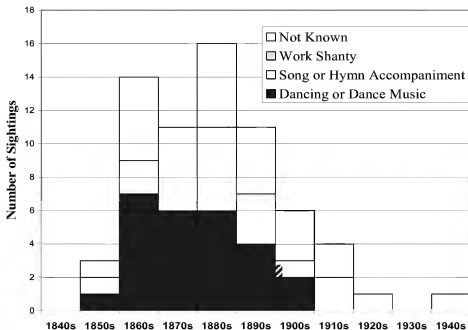


Figure 51. Types of music played by concertinas on ships, from sightings of 1840s-1940s.

### Types of concertinas and other instruments played at sea

What sorts of concertinas were played at sea? Available documentation of concertinas with proven ties to ships of this era is summarized in Table 2 below. German- and Anglo-German concertinas seem to have been the preferred types of concertinas by far. As nautical musician and former editor of *Concertina & Squeezebox* John Townley noted:

*The average tar . . . could not read music (or anything else), nor relate to the concepts of sharps, flats, or key changes, so for the common market a . . . concertina using the "Anglo" or "Anglo-German" fingering system was the most popular, in which the buttons produced different notes depending upon the direction of the bellows and which was, essentially, two simple button-*

*controlled harmonicas, mass and treble, strung up together with a bellows in between. Most feature only enough notes to play in two simple keys, with a few extra notes thrown in on the best for the most adventurous or talented. What made these instruments so popular at the ship's chandleries, which also featured banjos and fiddles, was the fact that they produced chords easily, and the simplest tar could use them to sing along with and pump out the occasional ditty with harmony notes automatically thrown in—and they were cheap! In essence, the fingering incorporated a built-in harmonic structure into which most songs fit and the player just followed along.<sup>108</sup>*

In the early decades of concertina use on ships, the 1850s and 1860s, German factories were churning out such concertinas for export by

the hundreds of thousands (Chapter 1). Figure 52 shows a German-made concertina that was sold from a ship's chandler in Plymouth England in the late nineteenth century. Higher-quality Anglo-German concertinas became available in the 1860s, and one was carried in that decade by sailor William Figg on the HMS *Oak* and *Juno* (Figure 10).

**Table 2. Concertinas with proven provenance to sailors on board ships**

- Anglo-German concertina made by George Jones, 1860s, owned by Royal Navy sailor William Figg, HMS *Royal Oak* and HMS *Juno* (see photograph in section on 1860s)
- Anglo-German concertina (?), probably English-made, owned by a sailor on Aitken and Lilburn line sailing ship, ca. 1890 (see photograph of ship's Foo Foo Band, in section on 1880s-1890s)
- Anglo-German concertina, probably English-made, owned by a sailor on American Man O'War, ca. 1890 (see photograph in above section on United States Navy)
- German-made Anglo concertina, owned by a sailor on board HMS *Orlando*, ca. 1897 (see photograph of HMS *Orlando* crew, Frontispiece)
- German-made two-row Anglo, exported to England, early 1900s, owned by a sailor on board *Wavertree* (see photograph above, from Stuart Frank's research)
- Jeffries Anglo concertina, owned by a sailor on HMS *Encounter*, 1907 (see photograph in section on Royal Navy, above)
- Ball Beavon (English-made) three-row Anglo concertina, early 1900s, owned by

a British sailor from Liverpool (from Stuart Frank's research; *Concertina and Squeezebox*, 1984)

- Wheatstone "Concert Model" English-system concertina, owned by Royal Navy sailor C. A. West on board the HMS *Isis*, a cruiser in service from 1896-1920 (in the collection of Stephen Chambers)
- Lachenal Edeophone English-system concertina, owned by a sailor on HMS *Endurance*, 1914 (see photograph in section on 1900s-1920s, above)
- Lachenal 31-button anglo-chromatic concertina, owned by Captain Thomas Jones of the White Star-Dominion line in business 1909-1926 (see photograph above; in the collection of the Merseyside Maritime Museum, Liverpool England)
- Wheatstone two-row 24-button Anglo-German concertina, owned by Rev. Kenneth Loveless, WWII British submarine; (now the property of Irish concertinist Jacqueline McCarthy)

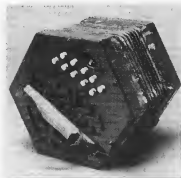


Figure 52. German-made concertina, maker's stamp 'CGH', exported to a musical instrument merchant in Plymouth England, late 19th century. It is in the collection of the Mariner's Museum, Newport News Va. The image is from Stuart Frank, *Concertina and Squeezebox*, vol. 11, no.2.



It might be reasonable to ask whether any of the above concertina "sightings" in print were actually misnamed accordion sightings. It is quite likely that a few of the above are such, perhaps the product of confusion on the part of a nonmusical writer. However, such confusion appears to be infrequent. In the above accounts, six carefully distinguish between accordions and concertinas in their descriptions of incidents—*Nancy Hanks*, 1866; *Merlin*, late 1860s; description of sailors dancing with Samoans, 1876; *City of Brussels*, 1880; newspaper description of Aleut playing in the Bering Sea, 1886; and *HMS Wolfe*, 1940s—indicating that most people knew the difference. Four of the eight accounts related to the whaling trade that are quoted above mention both concertina and accordion, carefully making the distinction. Moreover, digital searches show that there are as many or more descriptions of accordions and melodeons on board ships as there are of concertinas (see discussion below); most seagoing people of this era saw both and usually could tell them apart. There is only one German vessel in the above group of sightings. Nineteenth-century Germans often called their Uhlig-invented, free-reed products accordions, and of course still call their very large, square-ended Chemnitz boxes "concertinas." It is entirely possible that the German emigrant ship *Crown Prince* arrived in Texas in 1881 with a square-ended Chemnitz or Carlsfeld concertina rather than a six-sided Anglo-German model.

The English-system concertinas that were carried by crew members of the *Endurance* and the *Isis* in the early twentieth century are seemingly out of place in this group (Table 2), being the only documented occurrences of English-system instruments at sea in an admittedly small sampling of instruments. It is very probable that there were others. For example, the concertina that belonged to the captain of the *Allen Gardiner* in 1854 is a possible candidate since the captain might have had sufficient income to purchase one, but it is not likely that many sailors would have had these more expensive English-system instruments in the early years. Low placed sailors squarely

in the market for inexpensive German-made, Anglo-German concertinas, as well as for the lower end of English-made, Anglo-German instruments; Table 2 is in alignment with this interpretation. In the 1960s and 1970s, the appearance of Alf Edwards, who played the English system on recordings of maritime music with singer A.L. Lloyd, has inspired many revivalist nautical singers to follow suit with English-system instruments. The historical record, however, shows that German and later Anglo-German concertinas were the concertinas used by most sailors.

The concertina, although the object of much attention in this report, was not the most frequently played instrument on board ship—far from it. A reasonably good indication of relative frequency of occurrence of various instruments may be had by querying *Google's* digital books for the name of each instrument and the word "ship" in books written during the time period in which concertinas were most common (1860-1900). The results, as searched in January 2008, are shown in Table 3. There are obvious flaws; the words concertina, fiddle, and flute can be used variously as adjectives or verbs or as parts of other objects; such flaws make this hardly as "clean" and reliable a database as could be had with a few days' work. Nonetheless, a quick quality control check will show that the bulk of the "hits" obtained describe occurrences of musical instruments in books of that time period. I have searched only instruments likely to have belonged to sailors, and left out larger items like harmoniums, pianos, reed organs, et cetera, that would more likely belong to the ship or its captain. The results should only be interpreted in a qualitative way in perhaps three or four groupings of frequency of occurrence, but nonetheless may be of interest.

By far the most common musical instrument on board ship in the late nineteenth century was the fiddle or violin, which was recorded in nearly every instance where there is a concertina on board, and in many more where it is not. The ranking of the fiddle in the top spot should prove a surprise to no one who has read much literature of the sea (Figure 53). Also in the upper rank are

the guitar, the highly portable flute and the banjo. Of those, only the flute and banjo are mentioned in the sightings as having been played with the concertina; guitar sightings are almost exclusively not associated with concertinas. Accordions, tin whistles, and concertinas more or less comprise the middle range of frequency, with jew's harps, mandolins, and harmonicas or mouth organs having significantly fewer "hits." In popular perception today, the instruments most associated with sailors are accordions and concertinas even though they rank only in the middle range or frequency of occurrence within the group of instruments shown above. The fiddle, flute, guitar, and banjo are not popularly thought of as particularly nautical, perhaps because they are so common in other musical genres.

**Table 3. Frequency of occurrence of various musical instruments on board ships during the period 1860-1900, in numbers of "hits" from a digital search, January 2008. See text for explanation.**

Violin/fiddle	1315	Very High
Flute	676	
Guitar	625	High
Banjo	466	
Accordion	331	
Tin whistle	322	Medium
Concertina	262	
Jew's harp	151	
Mandolin	134	Low
Harmonica	121	
Mouth Organ		

The concertina and the accordion have public image that far outstrips their actual frequency of period use. In the case of the concertina, this image has come both from the mostly favorable reviews of its use in nonfiction narratives, as well as from descriptions of its use in fictional literature and in the cinema, from the middle nineteenth century to the present (see discussion below). Nonetheless, the concertina was both frequently played and much beloved on board. John Townley puts it well:

*They were the best (and most robust, contrary to some opinions) possible traveling instrument at sea, put out the most music for the space they took, and were perfect for the unskilled player.*<sup>109</sup>

### Decline and disappearance

Although the concertina had effectively disappeared on board commercial ships by the end of the First World War, a few slight reverberations of its earlier popularity are still to be seen in documents from the following decade or two. These all indicate either directly or indirectly that the heyday of concertinas had long since passed.

In 1922, the following story appeared in *The Times*:

#### *Musician or Beggar?*

*Before Mr. Hay Halkett, at Lambeth Police Court yesterday, A. G., 39, ship's carpenter, was charged with begging. It was stated that he was playing a concertina outside the Empress Music Hall, Brixton. When he was arrested, 6 pounds 7s 2 1/2d was found on him. He said he was a teetotaler, and had been saving it. Mr. White, for the defense, said that the prisoner was a man of excellent character and was in continuous employment up to last December, but had lately been unable to get a ship. He did not think he was begging; he thought he was giving good value for money by playing the concertina. A constable told the magistrate that it was a beautiful instrument, and the prisoner played it very well. The Magistrate passed the nominal sentence of one day's imprisonment.*<sup>110</sup>

Following the release and scrapping of many Royal Navy ships at the end of World War I, which approximately coincided with the end of the last British commercial sailing ships, many sailors found themselves in similar predicaments. Moreover, the need for ships' carpenters was decreasing as ships of all types became almost exclusively built of steel and iron. Former HMS *Vindictive* sailor David Blazer (see Figures 34 and 54) fared better because his concertina playing and other talents provided him



TARS CAROUSING.

Figure 53. The fiddle was the most frequently-played instrument on ships of the late 19th century. The image is 'Tars Carousing', from *The Life of George Cruikshank*, 1882, courtesy the Harry Elkins Widener Collection, Harvard University, HEW 3.1.312 v.4, p.173.

Figure 54. David Jacob Blazer, a former sailor of the HMS Vindictive (see Figure 34) later performed in the music halls, as half of the team 'Bright and Bright.' The image is from [www.maxalding.fsnet.co.uk](http://www.maxalding.fsnet.co.uk).



employment inside the music hall during this same decade. Another former sailor who turned to playing concertina in the music halls was Joe Maley of Glasgow, who went by the stage name “Jack Easy-the Musical Midshipman” and played a number of nautically themed tunes in his act. His career was long, lasting until the early 1970s.<sup>111</sup>

Even in steerage on transatlantic passenger ships, the once-common concertina had disappeared after World War I, as this 1922 piece from *The Times* indicates. It describes the departure of an emigrant ship in Queenstown Harbor, Cork, bound for America, and compares that departure with those of earlier days:

*The last time I saw this sight, the mingling of laughter and tears, the rough music, from Jew's harp to concertina, the homely luggage, the waving sticks and coloured handkerchiefs, gave me an endearing picture of human emotion, of parting that is sweet sorrow, of youthful hope and excitement, of wonder and of strange misgiving. What had happened in the interval? Music? There was none, not a concertina on board.*

By the middle- to late twentieth century, sailor's step-dancing and the use of concertinas at sea, as well as that of most other instruments, had effectively ceased as this recent posting from an online forum attests:

*Having followed the sea for a few years of my misspent youth, I can sadly report that playing and singing music at sea seems to have almost died out. I do know, however, from pictures and reading, that the concertina was a favorite among sailors because of its size and simplicity. By the time the 1970's rolled around, however, you might see a harmonica here and there, a few fellows singing along with a guitar, but generally those who tried to play instruments at sea were the butt of kidding by others. And I never have heard of ANYONE dancing at sea. I even spoke to a youngster who sailed on the USCGC Eagle (a square-rigged Coast Guard training ship) during a recent attempt to bring a scholar of sea music aboard the square rigger for a trip in an*

*attempt to restart the tradition, which for many reasons, resulted in failure.*<sup>112</sup>

What had happened to the once-common concertina? First and foremost, the rise and fall of the concertina at sea closely followed its fortunes on land. In England, Ireland, and the United States, usage of the German and Anglo-German concertina (the most popular system in all three countries) dropped in the first two decades of the twentieth century, then fell precipitously after World War I. Onshore, the reason has been partly ascribed to the advent of jazz, ragtime, and tin pan alley music that had become more chromatic than the little two-row, Anglo-German concertina could handle. This led to the adoption of other more chromatically able instruments like the guitar and the then-fashionable ukulele (see Chapter 2). Perhaps more importantly, recorded music and the rise of broadcast music on the radio meant that music from professional musicians was available to all; amateur musicians on all instruments began to leave their instruments in the closet.

There were other reasons for the concertina's declining use at sea, however. Almost all writers of sea novels or cruise narratives of this era (see discussion below) have remarked one way or another about the “melancholy” sound of the concertina at sea. A nineteenth-century sailing voyage was in many ways a long voyage of solitude, and the vastness and profound silence of the open sea (at least when it was not stormy) was disquieting to many a homesick sailor. The urban, onshore amateur musician at the time found in the concertina something creative to do during long winter nights in a mostly dark, quiet house or pub. On ship the need for diversion was much stronger as the sailor's lot was often burdened by homesickness and lengthy separation from loved ones—playing a plaintive air on the concertina acted as his therapy. With the arrival of modern steamships, voyage durations became shorter, trips became significantly less fraught with danger, and onboard recorded- and broadcast music (as well as telegraphic communication, indoor electrical lighting, and other such amenities) made a sailor feel somewhat less

adrift on a vast, empty sea, and consequently less in need of a concertina's therapeutic sound. Moreover, a sailor of average musical ability who might once have been highly regarded for his singing would think twice about doing that when his shipmates were listening to a broadcast of a professional jazz band.

Another reason for the decline of the concertina seems to be the change in a sailor's role onboard ship. For centuries the sailor's occupation had been outdoors in close communion with the wind and the stars—changing sail with the changes in the wind, and working day or night under a broad expanse of sky. With the advent of the age of steam, work went indoors and climbing the rigging was replaced by shoveling coal in the belly of a much larger ship. Work on a ship started to resemble work onshore. At first, as Robert L. Webb has pointed out, "sailors in the 19th Century derided the engine-room crews, the *black gang*, as being unable to handle a line or know how to work the gear on a sailing ship's deck."<sup>113</sup> When all ships changed to steam and diesel, the distinction was no longer made. All seamen are now called sailors, but the difference between sailing-ship sailors and steamship sailors was plainly evident at the time; a link with the past had been broken just as it had with the increase of amenities and the arrival of broadcast music. It is no coincidence that the end of the age of sail was the end, not only of the concertina, but of much other traditional instrumental music, dance, and song at sea.

## The nautical concertina in period fictional literature

*A concertina never sounds so well as on the water in the open air, with the skies above and the deep stillness of nature around. Then no other instrument can so faithfully express the sigh of the lonely heart for the home that is far away, for the father, the mother, and the sweetheart. The concertina should be played by strong, tanned hands. It holds no more subtle poetry than that of a seafarer's heart, throbbing with the simplest joys and sorrows.*

—Peter Nansen, 1908<sup>114</sup>

There is much more literature, both fiction and nonfiction, written about the concertina at sea than for any of its other genres—classical, Irish, morris dance, music hall, and so forth.<sup>115</sup> Fictional prose and poetry passages, like the nonfiction narratives discussed above, are overwhelmingly favorable and at times even gushing in their praise. This is in stark contrast to the period's treatment of the same Anglo-German concertinas on land. Christine Hawkes' comments in 1908 about "the cheap German atrocities with which Bank Holidays make us all too familiar" come to mind,<sup>116</sup> as does the review of an 1877 open-air free concert in New York City, where it was said that "the result of this [free concert] . . . has been to simulate a taste for good music among many of the lower classes who attended . . . and to make them abhor those tunes which are nightly heard on the concertina."<sup>117</sup>

The tone set by writers in describing the concertina at sea is typically much more positive, like the following from an 1899 William Clark Russell sea novel:

*The sun had set when Nassau ended (his work in the rigging) and the skipper called a hand aloft to relieve him. Some of the men sang a few songs, and then they lighted the lanterns, and bringing them together made a fine light, in which Old Stormy stood up and danced the sailor's hornpipe to a *concertina*. Ah! 'twas then a scene for the eye of a lover of nautical pieces to dwell*

upon; the subtle beauty of it pervading, dominating everything, like the incense breather by the earth in summer; and the purple light of the sun that was gone, and the pink effulgence that dwelt in the zenith softened into delicate violet into the far recesses of the east. In this light were all things bathed, and the schooner, with her dancing sailors, and her galaxy of lights amidships, and her sails descending from a dim purple into a dim whiteness, rippled through the shadow that was now upon the sea, and right ahead, risen at this time to her topgallant-sails, was the ship they had sighted before the festivity began.<sup>118</sup>

At the risk of including too much, here is another such evocative text by the same author, from 1892:

*It was about half-past seven when I stepped out of the saloon into a recess formed by the cabin-front and the bulkhead of a projecting cabin . . . The time was what is termed the dog-watch, when if the weather be fine and the ship demands little or no attention, the crew are at liberty to amuse themselves. They were doing so now; out of the gloom that shrouded the fore-castle came the strains of a *concertina* accompanying the manly notes of a seaman singing. The song was Tom Bowling, and the sailor's clear and*

*powerful voice fell back again upon the deck in a soft echo out of the stillness and concavities of the sails.<sup>119</sup>*

These passages are more poetic but hardly different in fact and mood from the nonfiction narratives discussed in the “sightings” above. Writers responded positively to the music of a simple concertina when surrounded by the vastness and solitude of the sea. Less exposure to the usual onshore stimuli seems to have enhanced the capacity in nearly all observers to admire simpler and more earthy forms of music.

The concertina arrived at sea earlier in fictional prose than it did in nonfiction. William Makepeace Thackeray (or possibly a colleague—it is difficult to tell from the 1848 journal itself) wrote a comic piece called *The Female Tars of Great Britain*, which chronicles in first person a Lady and her entourage on a sea trip across the English Channel (Figure 55):

*In the evening, a ball, and I played a small concertina (I had brought one with me to charm the dolphins), to enable the poor servants to dance. John Thomas and Jane Hussey went through a hornpipe as well as the uneven state of the yacht would allow them.<sup>120</sup>*



Figure 55. Another George Cruikshank illustration, this time depicting ladies on a yacht in *Female Tars of Great Britain*, 1848, where the concertina at sea may well have made its first literary (though not illustrated) appearance.

After Thackeray, a host of significant late-nineteenth-century writers incorporated concertinas and concertina imagery into their sea novels and stories, including Charles Dickens (in the journal *All the Year Round*, as was discussed above); Robert Louis Stevenson (*The Isle of Voices*; *The Ebb-Tide* (written with Lloyd Osbourne—his stepson, who played the concertina)); Lloyd Osbourne (*Wild Justice: Stories of the South Seas*); Joseph Conrad (*The N—r of the Narcissus*); W. Somerset Maugham (*The Trembling of a Leaf*); and the English poet John Masefield (*Right Royal; Sea Songs*). The latter wrote:

*Music is the one enjoyment of the sailor at sea. In the second dog-watch, in sunny latitudes, after supper, when the work about decks has ceased, the sailing ship's fore-castle hands hold a concert, or sing-song. Sometimes they gather together on the fore-castle-head, but more generally they sit about just forward of the fore-rigging, on the fore-hatch, to "sing their longing songs of home." They prefer a song with a chorus, so that all can take part in it. . . . When they begin to sing, in the hush of an evening, the reefers in the half-deck also start their sing-song . . . and perhaps the mate comes from his stuffy cabin, and sits on the booby hatch, and strums his banjo to the stars. I have sailed in a ship in which the mate was musical, and a good singer. He used to play the **concertina** every evening while he sang patriotic songs in a high sweet tenor voice. One of his songs had a chorus:*

*Under the good old flag,  
Under the good old flag,  
While fighting for England, he met his death,  
Under the good old flag.<sup>121</sup>*

By far the most prodigious user of concertina imagery in the late nineteenth century was William Clark Russell (1844-1911), an American who wrote more than fifty seafaring novels; Sherlock Holmes' sidekick, Dr. Watson, is depicted as reading one of "Clark Russell's fine sea novels" in one of Arthur Conan Doyle's stories. Concertina references abound in Russell's work, as has been shown in the two

quotes earlier in this section. Such references occur in *The Mystery of the Ocean Star*, *The Strange Elopement*, *Rose Island*, *Round the Galley Fire*, *Wreck of the Grosvenor*, *A Sea Queen*, *In the Middle Watch*, *The "Lady Maud" Schooner Yacht*, *Wrong Side Out*, *Marooned*, and others—almost all of which are now easily and fully available in digital versions, but are somewhat difficult to find in physical libraries today. They may not have stood the test of time in terms of lasting popularity but were frequently read in their day.

All of these late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century writers (perhaps with the understandable exception of Thackeray) wrote about the concertina in ways that reflected its actual use. These accounts used poetic imagery but not an inordinate amount of outright fantasy, as the following poem demonstrates:

# Sailor Town

Along the wharves in sailor town  
 a singing whisper goes  
 Of the wind among the anchored ships,  
 the wind that blows  
 Off a broad himming water,  
 where the summer day has died  
 Like a wounded whale a-sounding  
 in the sunset tide.

There's a big China liner  
 gleaming like a gull,  
 And her lit ports flashing;  
 there's the long gaunt hull  
 Of a Blue-Funnel freighter  
 with her derricks dark and still;  
 And a tall harque loading at the lumher mill.

And in the shops of sailor town  
 is every kind of thing  
 That the sailormen buy there,  
 or the ships' crews bring:  
 Shackles for a sea-chest  
 and pink cockatoos,  
 Fifty-cent alarm clocks and dead men's shoes.

You can hear the gulls crying,  
 and the cheerful noise  
 Of a **concertina** going, and a singer's voice —  
 And the wind's song and the tide's song,  
 crooning soft and low  
 Rum old tunes in sailor town that seamen know.

I dreamed a dream in sailor town,  
 a foolish dream and vain,  
 Of ships and men departed,  
 of old days come again —  
 And an old song in sailor town, an old song to sing  
 When shipmate meets with shipmate in the evening.

Cicely Fox Smith, 1914<sup>122</sup>

The list of authors given here only scratches the surface of the material to be found on this subject; scores of other fictional works discuss the concertina at sea.

## The concertina “revival,” cultural images, and the loss of history

After the concertina disappeared from ships, the appearance of concertinas in fictional works began to drift toward more fanciful imagery, usually at the hands of Hollywood, and most frequently in films made in the 1950s. Spencer Tracy portrayed a Portuguese sailor playing a concertina (with an accordion in the sound track) in *Captains Courageous*; Walt Disney injected one into *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*; Pat Boone sings with a fake German concertina while at sea on a raft in *Journey to the Center of the Earth*; Bing Crosby uses a stage-prop concertina while crooning *True Love* to Grace Kelly on a yacht in *High Society*, and a puppet pirate pumps a concertina in Disneyland's *Pirates of the Caribbean* amusement park ride. Concertina players of a certain age today were more affected by the images from such 1950s Hollywood fare than they were from the late-nineteenth-century fiction of a William Russell or a Robert Louis Stevenson. Among baby boomer-era concertina players and writers, such powerful, fanciful images have had some surprising and thought-provoking results, as we shall see.

Beginning in England in the late 1960s and 1970s, the concertina underwent a dramatic revival in interest within a limited portion of the musical public (Chapter 2). Most of the revival's early focus was on the English-system instrument, and much of the early “revival” writing was about Wheatstone and other Victorian English builders, as well as about the use of the English-system and duet instruments in performances of classical and parlor music of the mid- and late-nineteenth century.

By the time of the revival, the concertina had not been commonly played at sea for about two generations. A few concertina enthusiasts, in particular John Townley and Robert L. Webb, wrote brief articles for the now-defunct *Concertina and Squeezebox* magazine in the early 1980s, trying to establish that concertinas had once been played at sea, but the focus of the concertina revival was largely elsewhere. Unlike Irish traditional music, Australian bush dance



music, and English morris dance music, each of which has recorded examples of pre-revival players, there are no recordings of concertina-playing sailors from pre-revival times, so modern, nautically minded interpreters have been free to improvise. English singers Ewan MacColl and A.L. Lloyd released a masterful set of recordings of sea shanties and forebitters in the late 1960s, where the accompaniment in many of the songs was provided by English-system concertinist Alf Edwards.

This set the scene for a provocative 1984 article in *Concertina* and *Squeezebox* magazine by Dr. Stuart M. Frank entitled *Concertina Around Cape Horn*. Dr. Frank is both a nautical musician and concertina player as well as a Senior Curator at the Kendall Institute, the research arm of the New Bedford Whaling Museum in the old whaling town of New Bedford, Massachusetts. The article opens with the following statement:

*The presence of concertinas on shipboard in the Age of Sail has been greatly exaggerated. The handy little instruments seem to have been more popular with lithographers than seamen, and it is largely from illustrations of sailors done by landsmen ashore that our heritage of concertinas on shipboard derives. While in their own journal and voyage narratives sailors mention all manner and kind of musical instrument—fiddles, accordions, banjos, guitars, and even small parlor organs—the concertina does not figure at all. In fact, after having read literally hundreds of pieces of sailor writing, in manuscript and in print, I have not encountered even a single instance in which the concertina is mentioned or even alluded to. Whatever mention there may be in such firsthand voyage accounts must be very rare indeed, as it had eluded the scrutiny of the dozens who have searched. The square-rig sailors who have survived to tell of the experiences with shipboard music—including the late Carl Andersen of Mystic Seaport Museum, Captain A.F. Raynaud (now a marine surveyor in Seattle who was involved in the restoration of the Star of India in San Diego), and the irrepressible Stan Hugill of Aberdovey, Wales—are all unanimous in claiming never to*

*have seen a concertina on shipboard, even once.*<sup>123</sup>

The internet era allows one to search for things that are deeply buried in forgotten books and diaries in a way that was unimaginable a quarter century ago when such pieces were written, and we can now see that Frank's pre-internet conclusions are largely incorrect. As discussed above, there is a rich array of firsthand accounts that place concertinas at sea from the 1850s through the First World War. As also shown above, there are roughly as many references to concertinas at sea as there are to other instruments there; the concertina was documented as well as or better than other instruments onboard ships, at least in firsthand observations. The problem has always been to find these fleeting references in the mountain of nautical literature since concertinas (and other musical instruments) are almost never the subject of sea narratives, but are only bit players in them.

Regarding the late Stan Hugill's reported comments that he had never seen a concertina at sea, Hugill started off to sea about 1924, after the concertina's days were effectively over. As was documented above, even the ship of Hugill's epic shipwreck experience, the *Garthpool*, witnessed at least one concertina on board. However this occurred a decade earlier than Hugill's time of service, when that ship was running under the name *Juteopolis*.

For the next two decades, Frank's article left a clear impression with many that concertina playing at sea in the days of sail was a complete, modern fabrication. In the years that followed, spirited debates took place in online concertina "forum" threads, with inconclusive outcomes.<sup>124</sup> In a *coup de grace* supporting the "it's-a-myth" interpretation, the BBC's Radio 4 *Making History* program interviewed John Kirkpatrick, England's most well-known Anglo-concertina player and a champion of English traditional music, in May 2007. The interviewer began by mentioning that a listener had questioned the validity of a concertina accompaniment on a recording of folk singer A.L. Lloyd, which had some days earlier been used by the BBC to "give flavor" to a piece on whaling (Alf Edwards was

the concertinist). The listener who called in was uncertain whether the concertina, being “delicate,” could survive the pressures of a sailing voyage and therefore wondered whether its use in the whaling piece was incorrect. In a prearranged call, the host of *Making History* telephoned Kirkpatrick for more information:

*BBC: Now, is [the listener] right about all this?*

*John Kirkpatrick: Yes he is, he's bang on. Captain Pugwash [author's note: a nautically themed British children's television show of previous decades] has created a real myth about squeezeboxes on pirate ships and stuff. The signature tune is played on an accordion . . . although Tom the Cabin Boy is always pictured with a concertina . . . (sample playing of a concertina).*

*BBC: It all sounds so nautical doesn't it? It just sounds right.*

*JK: Yes, they've got a lovely nostalgic feel you know, and we're so used to the sound of them now, behind films and documentaries and things that it's unthinkable they could have not been there, but it's really quite a recent introduction.*

*BBC: They weren't actually much good on board, were they?*

*JK: Well, to start with they're incredibly expensive; certainly a poor sailor wouldn't be able to afford one. And I think if you played one in a howling gale around Cape Horn, by the time you got round to the other side it would have just fallen to pieces, you know.*

*BBC: And presumably, the water, the seawater would have been disastrous on something like this.*

*JK: Absolutely. Their bellows would just disintegrate, their metal reeds inside would go rusty or corrode, and everything would just fall to bits. It wouldn't last very long at sea.*

*BBC: And it would have been the captain who would have been the only one probably able to afford it, let alone an ordinary seaman.*

*JK: That's right, yes. Absolutely, yes. Eventually you get cheaper versions of all these instruments. You play them for pleasure but not to sing with, and the thing about shanties and working songs on the ship, you know, it was a gang of fellows hauling on a rope, usually because the weather was rough, and you were attending to the sails or something like that. And the songs were to keep in time, to pull on the ropes together you know, like classic work song stuff. But they were always sung unaccompanied, and the rhythm was the thing rather than the music; so there was no accompaniment to these songs at all.*

*BBC: How come we've gone then from the reality of unaccompanied music on deck on the ship, to accompanied music with sea shanties and traditional maritime songs?*

*JK: Well, I think that's a product of the folk music revival which sort of kicked off during the twentieth century, the big folk club revival, inspired by people like A. L. Lloyd that we were just listening to. They pioneered the idea of accompanying songs with instruments like the concertina. A. L. Lloyd was probably the first person to have a concertina player accompany his folk songs, and it just works very sweetly, you know. But it is a kind of concert or indoor idea, you know; it's not something that happened naturally or traditionally in the sort of natural setting for these things. So there's lots of people now, in the last sort of fifty or sixty years who are used to hearing these songs accompanied by squeezeboxes and other instruments including the guitar of course. But in their natural setting it was a very, very rare thing to find any accompanied singing.<sup>125</sup>*

To repeat, with current, digitally based research we have access to information that was clearly lost in the nearly fifty-year “gap” in general concertina usage. We can now respectfully assert that little of Kirkpatrick's commentary has any real basis in historical fact,

excepting the statement that concertinas were not used for shanties—indeed, they were typically not. Sailors were clearly able to afford both cheap, German-made, and even higher-quality, English-built concertinas, and concertinas were able to withstand the rigors of a long voyage on a sailing ship. For example, Seaman William Figg's Jones-built, Anglo-German concertina withstood several voyages on two separate Royal Navy vessels in the 1860s and now lies in England's National Maritime Museum. Other seagoing concertinas from the same period are on display at the Merseyside Maritime Museum, Liverpool, and the Mariner's Museum in Newport News, Virginia.

It is certain that concertinas were used for song accompaniment at sea long before A. L. Lloyd, from at least the 1860s—when the crew of the *John Williams* sang hymns to a concertina accompaniment in the forecabin after a bad storm; in the 1870s to 1890s, when explorer Matt Henson sang hymns to a concertina accompaniment while serving on the *Nancy Hinds* and the *Kite*; when the crew on the *Cimba* sang the “age-old songs of the sea” with concertinas and banjo accompaniment in the 1890s; and when the English poet John Masfield (see above) sailed on a tall ship where the mate “used to play the concertina every evening while he sang patriotic songs in a high sweet tenor voice.” Indeed, the Salvation Army published an Anglo-concertina tutor for the specific purpose of song (in their case, hymn) accompaniment in 1888.<sup>126</sup> As Roger Digby points out, there had been little or no such concertina-accompanied singing in English traditional circles in the decades immediately previous to A. L. Lloyd's recording.<sup>127</sup>

How is it that two recognized and well-respected experts on traditional music, concertinas, and sea lore such as Frank and Kirkpatrick have gotten so many facts and interpretations wrong? The main factor seems to be the long gap between the disappearance of concertinas at sea—effectively by about 1920—and the beginning of the concertina revival in the early 1970s. By 2007, three or four generations had passed since concertinas had actually been

played at sea, and since the closing of the last days of commercial sail in England and America. This was more than long enough a span of time to let most shared public memories of life at sea slowly fray, unravel, and break—and long enough for the firsthand sailors and observers who lived at sea in the prime years of the nineteenth century era of sail to have passed away. Memories held by an older generation faded—memories of concertinas used in twilight dances on deck under a tropical sky or of Royal Navy sailors dancing a hornpipe to its sound—and succeeding generations saw only *Captain Pugwash's* “Tom the Cabin Boy,” fictional Disney pirates, and Tinseltown crooners with fake “squeezeboxes.” Baby boomers (the generation born in the two decades following World War II) saw that cultural image as false by testing it with other perceptions and facts: pirates with concertinas are a clear anachronism, the music coming out of Tom the Cabin Boy's concertina was really an accordion, and Bing Crosby isn't really playing that concertina because his fingers aren't moving. They then quite rationally rejected the image, and everything that went with it.

A specific illustration of this cultural phenomenon may be useful. As we have seen, a sailor from the HMS *Excellent* played a concertina on deck in 1872. The scene was documented by an observer as follows:

*[There was] a concertina in full swing playing Jack's the Lad, while a score or more of step-dancers execute wonderful performances with their bare feet on the deck, their rough soles sounding like the rasp of a knife being cleaned on a brick-dust board.*<sup>128</sup>

That tune, *Jack's the Lad* (Figure 56), is also called the *College Hornpipe*, and more frequently today, the *Sailor's Hornpipe*. Its first printing in London was in 1797-98, and it has been found in an even earlier Massachusetts manuscript dated 1766. The hornpipe was frequently danced by nineteenth-century sailors on board ship, largely for exercise in an otherwise cramped space. Captain Cook is known to have ordered his men to exercise by dancing the hornpipe,<sup>129</sup> and that is

just what seems to be happening in the above sighting—twenty sailors getting in their aerobics to the tune of the *Sailor's Hornpipe*.

Observers on Royal Navy ships in the middle- and late-nineteenth century frequently saw the hornpipe danced, and the tune became widely associated with sailors. As mentioned in an above section, when an Irish Customs officer in the early decades of the twentieth century challenged an old salt on what might be inside his concertina, what he asked the sailor to play was the same sailor's hornpipe that was danced by the crew on the *Excellent*—the tune was by then universally associated by the general public with sailors. That association, with its powerful cultural images, found its way rather early into film. In 1929, the first of the very popular *Popeye the Sailor* cartoons was released and the *Sailor's Hornpipe* was worked into the early part of the nautical character's theme song. *Popeye's* creator, Elzie Segar (1894-1938), shared with his audience this association of the tune with sailors, but the sailors that he created were celluloid. For the next two generations that series of cartoons remained popular either at the cinema or later on

television. In the 1933 film *Duck Soup*, Groucho Marx mock-danced to the tune of the same *Sailor's Hornpipe* (Figure 57).

The tune had by then been transferred to newer generations as a hackneyed, comic tune associated with cartoonish make-believe sailors or with a manic actor's shenanigans; and new public associations among comic sailors, the *Sailor's Hornpipe* and, incidentally, concertinas were forged. By 2002, when English concertinist Alistair Anderson appeared for an interview on National Public Radio (July 28, 2002), the interviewer began with the following introduction:

*Some people call it a squeezebox, some know it as the instrument played by Popeye the Sailor Man, but its official name is the concertina. It was invented in Germany in 1829, not long after its cousin, the accordion, and it became a staple of European folk music. (Soundbite of music) This is Alistair Anderson playing the traditional tune Random Notes. Anderson is regarded as one of the finest concertina players in the world.*



Figure 56. The tune *Jack's the Lad*, also known as the *Sailor's Hornpipe*. From O'Neill's *The Dance Music of Ireland*, Chicago, 1907.



Figure 57. Groucho Marx dancing to the tune *Sailor's Hornpipe*, in the 1933 movie *Duck Soup*.

Americans of a certain age grew up hearing the *Sailor's Hornpipe* in its comic form, and tend to associate it, and the concertina, with comic nautical figures as a result. In any given traditional music session today in the United States, one would rarely see that tune played because such an effort would usually be met with wisecracks. Any moviemaker who might try to place the real-life "concertina-playing-the-Sailor's Hornpipe-with-twenty-sailors-dancing-along" scene from the HMS *Excellent* into a serious modern film about nineteenth-century sea life (for example, into a sea film like the 2005 hit, *Master and Commander*) would be rewarded with smirks from the audience in a contemporary U.S. movie theater. A similar fate was met by the hapless "expert" brought in to reintroduce "nautical" song and dance to the crew of the Coast Guard tall ship *Eagle* (see discussion above). No one in the trainee crew would have anything to do with it, largely because of the powerful shared image baby boomers and younger generations typically have that only cartoon figures, not real people, dance to the *Sailor's Hornpipe* and sing sailor's songs. Shared public memories that once correctly tagged the *Sailor's Hornpipe* as a real-life sailor's dancing tune have, in more recent generations, frayed, relegating it—at least in the U.S.—to the dust bin of hackneyed and discredited tunes, as if it never existed. The powerful effect of children's cartoon figures on the public image of concertina playing has also been seen in the UK. John Kirkpatrick regarded the British children's television cartoon series of the 1970's, *Captain Pugwash*, where Tom the Cabin Boy played concertina, as the root cause of the "myth" of concertina playing at sea.

As a result of these celluloid images, the links among sailors, nautical music, concertinas, and hornpipes have been made to appear so ridiculous in popular culture that they are no longer credible in many quarters. Stuart Frank commented on this:

*Add to this images of cute little Sailor Lads sashaying across the pages of the likes of The Fireside Book of Folk Songs wielding round, Edeophone-like wind-wheezers, and the result is (like the analogous **concertina**-playing*

*Handsome Gondolier* stereotype) quite a powerful cultural image, one not easily debunked in the layperson's cottages.<sup>1</sup>

Therein lies the rub. Frank and Kirkpatrick set out to debunk that myth for those laymen in their cottages, never realizing that the very same powerful cultural images that they fought against had indirectly led them to the erroneous conclusion that no concertina could ever go to sea. It is the time gap of more than two generations between the instrument's last period of popular use and the beginning of the current "revival" that provides the disconnect—large parts of the Anglo concertina's history had passed out of living memory and become effectively lost, even among experts and recognized keepers of the tradition.

*It was in the dog-watch that the blast came, when least expected. The breeze had been light, but steady enough, this afternoon, so that sails were spread out to catch what they could, making speed enough just to keep them solid on their tracks. Half of the men lay upon their backs, looking skywards, watching the wreaths of smoke from their clays, as they rose straight up for a time, then were dashed aside and scattered into the blue darkness of the night, and listening, as they lay, to the sounds of a **concertina** which one of the lads swung lazily about, as he, too, lay upon his back: a fair sample of the many nights at sea when a sailor's life is worth living.*

—Hume Nesbitt, *A Colonial Tramp: Travels and Adventures in Australia and New Zealand*, 1896<sup>2</sup>

## Resources

### Nineteenth century dance music appropriate for maritime re-enactors

As we have seen, the concertina was used at sea primarily for playing *dance* music, secondarily for playing for song accompaniment during dog-watch and other slack times, and rarely if ever for accompanying working shanties. These facts suggest that adjustments might be made in the material used by period re-enactors and performers of nineteenth-century nautical music on the concertina. The following notes are meant as suggestions to such performers. Comments are here restricted to period dance music rather than song.

Most reenactment instrumental music heard today, where attempts are made at nautically appropriate music, draws heavily from the repertoire of current Irish traditional music groups and as heavily favors reels and jigs. Between 1850 and 1880 when the concertina was in its early prime in the age of sail, the mix of tunes played for dances was far more diverse in dance rhythms than is the traditional music typically played today. Documents show that step-dance tunes—jigs and hornpipes—were indeed played (often for exercise) but that onboard and port-side social dances more often consisted of the ballroom dances that were the great fashion at the time in England, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and South Africa. These consisted of quadrilles, schottisches, galops, waltzes, and polkas. The polka is mentioned in several documents as a particular favorite of sailors. An appropriate mix of dance tunes for the 1860s and 1870s might include those dances done on the bark-rigged, steam sloop-of-war USS *Nautilus* when in port in 1864:

*The string band had played familiar airs, during the rambles of people over the ship, and they now began upon the list of dances. Lancers, quadrilles, minuets, waltzes, polkas and reels were danced upon the quarter-deck and greatly enjoyed by guests and hosts. . . . At intervals, one*

*or more of the sailors danced a double-shuffle, a hornpipe, or a breakdown, with a great deal of flexibility; others sang nautical songs, played the concertina, the harmonica, the jew's harp, the flute, the flageolet or the bones, and two nimble fellows gave an exhibition of their remarkable skill with wooden broadswords, to the delight of the assembly.*<sup>132</sup>

Finding period-appropriate jigs, reels, and hornpipes is never difficult; Irish-themed collections have published them in abundance. There were certainly Irish sailors on board these ships in large numbers, but they shared forecabin space with many more English- and Anglo-American sailors—to say nothing of African Americans—and lesser numbers of French, Germans, Swedes, Poles, and other ethnic groups. For English collections of period dance music, good sources are tunebooks like the mid-nineteenth-century *William Winter's Quantocks Tune Book*, recently republished in Britain by the Halsway Manor Society, or the recently published *Hardcore English* tunebook from the English Folk Dance and Song Society. The American “bible” of traditional music has long been *Ryan's Mammoth Fiddle Tunes* (1882), which was reprinted by Mel Bay Publications in the 1990s (it is commonly known by an earlier, completely plagiarized version called *Cole's Fiddle Tunes*, 1941, now out of print).

A problem with using the *Ryan's* collection is that it tends to concentrate on reels, hornpipes, and jigs somewhat to the detriment of other dance forms popular in the 1850s to 1870s. O'Neill's *Music of Ireland* is similarly limited (indeed, it has been reported that the good captain plagiarized many of *Ryan's* American tunes, often giving them new Irish names).<sup>133</sup> *Ryan's Mammoth Tunes*, however, sprang from earlier-published, much more extensive collections of American dance music by Elias Howe Jr.,<sup>134</sup> which contain quadrilles, schottisches, and the like. By the time *Ryan* made his choices for a new and revised tunebook with his colleague Howe in 1882, many of these older dances had lost favor and were dropped from *Ryan's* collection. Unfortunately, Howe's earlier

tune books, which included these earlier dances, are out of print. However, two of Howe's concertina instruction books, both from 1879, are available in full for free download at The Concertina Library (<http://www.concertina.com>); a third such tutor by Alfred Sedgwick (1893) is likewise useful and available for download there. These three tutors offer a wide variety of period-appropriate dance tunes in all the forms mentioned above.

As has been discussed, nineteenth-century blackface minstrel music was also a constant feature on board ship as well as onshore (see for example, the accounts of the British schooner-yacht *Selene*, 1868, and the London-to-Melbourne passenger ship *Suffolk* in 1878). The arrival of banjos on ships came about as a result of the popularity of these minstrel shows; as minstrel music gained popularity, many composers reflected this genre in their new tunes and songs. Stephen Foster is an obvious example (witness the sailors of *Lucinde* dancing *Oh, Susannah!* with Inuit girls), and the three tutors mentioned above include much of his repertoire. Less well known are composers like Dan Emmett, Edwin Christie, and Frank Livingston; many fine dance tunes attributed to them are to be found in the *Ryan's* collection.

Finally, the issue of "nautical style" on the concertina should be mentioned, as historically correct traditional style is very frequently a topic of discussion by players of Irish traditional and English Morris dance genres. Because there are no recordings of sailors who lived in the late-nineteenth- or early-twentieth century and played concertinas, the field is wide open for interpretation. The fact that many observers comment on its "harmonious" sound in song accompaniment suggests that chords were being used when it was played for singing. When played for dances, it seems quite likely that it was done so in the manner of old-time players onshore in England, Ireland, and Australia—either using an octave technique, or played singly in an along-the-row manner (see Chapters 2, 3, and 7, and the transcriptions of Chapter 10). What we know for sure is that most observers liked what they heard!

## Tutors

One person who has both spent considerable time at sea and who has attempted to reinvent a nautically appropriate style on the Anglo concertina is John Townley, a former editor of the now-defunct *Concertina & Squeezebox* magazine. His videotaped tutor is *The Seaman's concertina: A beginning to the Anglo concertina in the nautical style*, a DVD produced by Lark in the Morning, Fort Bragg, CA; DVD058.

## Recordings

There are no archival recordings of sailors on concertinas from the classic days of sail and steam. There are, however, scores of revival-era recordings. Here are a few:

A. L. Lloyd's nautical recordings with Ewan MacColl feature tracks with the tasteful English-system concertina playing of Alf Edwards, starting with the album *The Singing Sailor* on Topic Records (TRL3) in 1956. Others Topic recordings include 1960s' *Row, Bullies, Row* and *The Black Ball Line*. Lloyd and MacColl also recorded whaling songs on *Thar She Blows* for Riverside Records. These maritime recordings with the playing of Alf Edwards are one of the several key catalysts that inspired the concertina revival in the UK.

John Roberts, *Sea Fever* (Golden Hind Music). Roberts sings and plays the Anglo concertina on this CD of nautically themed songs.

Bob Webb, a Maine-based nautical historian, records shanties on the duet concertina as well as the banjo: [www.richmondwebb.com](http://www.richmondwebb.com).

The Bitter End website contains descriptive information on recordings of shanties made in the UK: <http://www.shanty.co.uk>.

The 1980 Folkways Records recording "Songs of the Sea" includes tunes by American concertina players Bob Webb, Stuart Frank, and Peter Persoff.



Figure 58. Nautically-themed postcard. England, ca. 1905.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This article was originally published in 2008 at <http://www.angloconcertina.net>.

<sup>2</sup> William Clark Russell, "Old Ships," *The Mystery of the Ocean Star, a Collection of Marine Sketches* (New York: Appleton and Company, 1888), p. 190.

<sup>3</sup> G. W. Phillips, *The Missionary Martyr of Tierra del Fuego, Being the Memoir of Mr. J. Garland Phillips* (London: Wertheim, Macintosh and Hunt, 1861), p. 55.

<sup>4</sup> W. P. Snow, "A Few Remarks on the Wild Tribes of Tierra del Fuego from Personal Observation," *Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London*, vol. 1, (1861), pp. 261-267.

<sup>5</sup> "The White Star Journal," The Marine Historical Association, (1951). Published weekly on board the clipper ship White Star in 1855 during a passage from Liverpool, England, to Melbourne, Australia, with 600 emigrants.

<sup>6</sup> James Cowan, *The Adventures of Kimble Bent* (London: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1911). Kimble Bent eventually wound up in New Zealand and lived with the Maoris for many years while on the run from British authorities. His story was captured by a British writer in a 1903 interview.

<http://www.nzetc.org/tm/scholarly/tei-CowKimb.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Robert L. Webb, personal communication with the author, 2008. With thanks for his help in interpreting this unusual event.

<sup>8</sup> Henry Mayhew, "Concertina Player on the Steamboats," *Labour and the London Poor*, vol. 3, (London, 1861). Reprinted with introductory note by Allan Atlas, *Papers of the International Concertina Association* 1 (2004).

<sup>9</sup> W. G. Cookesley, *Memorial Sketch of Frederick John Cookesley* (London: William Hunt and Company, 1867).

<sup>10</sup> Charles Dickens, *All the Year Round, A Weekly Journal*, vol. 6 (London, 1862): p.538.

<sup>11</sup> From the diary of Fanny Fry Simmons, as recounted by Fred E. Woods, "Seagoing Saints," *Ensign*, (September 2001).

<sup>12</sup> *Journal of John David McAllister*, vol. 4, (May 15, 1862), LDS Church Archives, 6. As quoted in Fred E. Woods' "Seagoing Saints," *Ensign*, (September 2001).

<sup>13</sup> Ship Log of Jonas Woodhouse from London to New Zealand, 1863. <http://www.irvinggill.com/jonas.html>.

<sup>14</sup> J. W. Whitcomb, ed., *The Essex Chronicle, Published on board "The Essex" on her Homeward Voyage, Melbourne to England, 1864*, p. 29.

<sup>15</sup> Report by William Passmore, as quoted by John Townley, *Concertina and Squeezebox*, numbers 14 and 15 (1987), p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Department of the Navy, Navy Historical Center, Washington DC, <http://www.history.navy.mil>.

<sup>17</sup> William Henry Winslow, *Naval Lads and Lassies in War with Dixie* (Boston: C.M. Clark Publishing Co., 1911), p. 170. This book is an account of the author's wartime service on the USS Nautilus. He wrote another account in *Cruising and Blockading, A Naval Story of the Late War* (Pittsburgh: Weldin and Co., 1885).

<sup>18</sup> National Maritime Museum, Musical Instrument Collection. Described online at

<http://www.nmm.ac.uk/server/show/ConWebDoc.635/setPaginate/No>

<sup>19</sup> Frank Buttler, "Letters," *Concertina & Squeezebox Magazine*, vol. 2 no. 4, (1984): p. 24.

<sup>20</sup> These advertisements can be found in the endplates of many Glasgow- and London-published books of the 1860s and 1870s, and can be searched by Google Books.

<sup>21</sup> Marquis of Lorne, *To the Tropics and Home Through America* (London: Hurst and Blackett Publishers, 1867), p. 11.

<sup>22</sup> "The Lasca-Selene Race," *The New York Times*, August 22, 1894.

<sup>23</sup> "The Voyage of the Selene," *Hunt's Yachting Magazine*, vol.19 (London): pp. 531.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid*, p. 531.

<sup>25</sup> Ambrose Elwell, *At the Sign of the Red Swan (a Memoir)* (Boston: Small, Maynard and Co., 1919), p. 28-29.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Paton, "The John Williams," *The Sabbath Scholars Treasury, in Connexion with the Church of Scotland*, vol.VI, no. 5 (Edinburgh 1865), pp. 25-29.

<sup>27</sup> *Boston Daily Advertiser*, February 13, 1862, Issue 38, column D. *The North American* (Philadelphia), August 5, 1878, column 1.

<sup>28</sup> "When I was Seven," reminiscences of Helen (Nellie) Allen aboard the bark *Merlin*. As quoted by Robert Lloyd Webb, "Free Reeds Aboard the Whaleships," *Concertina & Squeezebox*, no. 17, (1988): p. 16-19.

<sup>29</sup> John David Hamilton, *Arctic Revolution: Social Change in the Northwest Territories, 1935-1994* (Dundurn Press Ltd., 1994), p. 14.

<sup>30</sup> William Thalbitzer and Thomas Thomsen, *The Ammassalik Eskimo: A Rejoinder*, (1923), p. 43. In the library of the University of Michigan.

<sup>31</sup> A. Barclay Walker, *The Cruise of the Esquimaux, Steam Whaler, to Davis Straits and Baffin Bay, April-*

October, 1899 (Liverpool: Liverpool Printing and Stationery Company Ltd, 1906). From his diary.

<sup>32</sup> A. Riis Carstensen, *Two Summers in Greenland* (London: Chapman and Hall Ltd., 1890), p. 25.

<sup>33</sup> "Journal of American Folklore," *American Folklore Society*, vol. 54-55, (1941-1942): p. 227.

<sup>34</sup> Henry Wood Elliott, *Our Arctic Province: Alaska and the Seal Islands* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1886), pp. 174-176, quoted in 'Music Hath Charms', *San Jose (California) Mercury-News*, May 26, 1887.

<sup>35</sup> Libby Beaman, 1879 diary, [http://benmuse.typepad.com/ben\\_muse/2005/12/an\\_al\\_eut\\_christ.html](http://benmuse.typepad.com/ben_muse/2005/12/an_al_eut_christ.html).

<sup>36</sup> Pulaarvik Kablu Friendship Centre, Nunavut, (2008),

<http://www.pulaarvik.ca/community/Inuit.html>

<sup>37</sup> Jim Hiscott, "Inuit Accordion Music-A Better Kept Secret," *Bulletin de Musique Folklorique Canadienne*, 34.112 (2(xx))

<sup>38</sup> J. W. Boddam-Whetham, *Pearls of the Pacific* (London: Hurst and Blackett Publishers, 1876), p. 164.

<sup>39</sup> "Import Inquest," *The Irish Times*, January 20, 1870.

<sup>40</sup> Litton Forbers, *Two Years in Fiji* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1875), p. 235.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 257.

<sup>42</sup> "Billets Ashore," *Daily Evening Bulletin*, (San Francisco CA), Feb. 1, 1873, col A.

<sup>43</sup> Bill Pickelhaupt, *Shanghaied in San Francisco* (Lafayette Ca: Great West Books, 1996).

<sup>44</sup> "Our Seamen and Sea Captains," *The Shipwrecked Mariner, A Quarterly Maritime Magazine*, (January 1871): p. 73.

<sup>45</sup> A. Ristori, *Memoirs and Artistic Studies of Adelaide Ristori* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1907), p. 93.

<sup>46</sup> "Impressions of a Trip to Jamaica and Back," *The United Presbyterian Magazine*, William Oliphant and Co., vol. XXI, (Edinburgh, 1877): p. 454.

<sup>47</sup> "The Stage Afloat," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, January 5, 1879.

<sup>48</sup> Rev. Arthur Lewis, "The Early Life of E. J. Peck," *The Life and Work of the Rev. E.J. Peck Among the Eskimos* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1904), p. 8.

<sup>49</sup> The Fleets, <http://www.theshipslist.com>.

<sup>50</sup> "Crossing the Atlantic," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, July 24, 1878, p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> "Boa Constrictor in London," *The Irish Times*, June 5, 1876.

<sup>52</sup> "Wreck of the Ellen Southard," *The Irish Times*, Oct. 4, 1875.

<sup>53</sup> Floyd Miller, *Ahdoolo! The Biography of Matthew A. Henson* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1963), p. 18.

<sup>54</sup> (Off for the North Pole," *New York Times*, June 6, 1891.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>56</sup> This interview is quoted at <http://www.matthewhenson.org>.

<sup>57</sup> [http://www.arlingtoncemetery.org/historical\\_information/matthew\\_henson.html](http://www.arlingtoncemetery.org/historical_information/matthew_henson.html)

<sup>58</sup> Anna Brendle, "Profile: African-American North Pole Explorer Matthew Henson," (2003), online at <http://news.nationalgeographic.com>.

<sup>59</sup> "The Sea Voyage of the Brussels from Liverpool to New York," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, September 10, 1880, p. 4.

<sup>60</sup> "A Thousand Immigrants," *Galveston Daily News*, October 11, 1881, col. A.

<sup>61</sup> "The Loss of the Teuton," *The Times* (London), September 30, 1881.

<sup>62</sup> "Disasters at Sea," *The Times* (London), January 14, 1889, p. 10.

<sup>63</sup> E. F. Knight, *Cruise of the "Falcon," a Voyage to South America in a 30 ton Yacht* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1884), p. 22.

<sup>64</sup> Alfred St. Johnston, *Camping Among Cannibals* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1883), p. 5.

<sup>65</sup> William MacGregor, *British New Guinea, Country and People* (London: John Murray, 1897), p. 96.

<sup>66</sup> H. B. Guppy, *The Solomon Islands and Their Natives* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, Lowrey and Co., 1887), p. 141.

<sup>67</sup> Annie Butler, *Glimpses of Maori Land* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1886), p. 20.

<sup>68</sup> J. F. Keane, *On Blue Water, Some Narratives of Sport and Adventure in the Modern Merchant Service* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1883), p.125.

<sup>69</sup> "Trawling in the North Sea," *The Times* (London), September 15, 1883, p. 6.

<sup>70</sup> "Timely Talk," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, August 29, 1887.

<sup>71</sup> Fred A. Schmidt, *Matson's Century of Ships*, 1982, privately published.

<sup>72</sup> Dan Worrall (for example), *Notes on the Beginnings of Concertina Playing in Ireland, 1834-1930*, (2007), <http://www.concertina.com>.

<sup>73</sup> "Life on a Liner," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, April 6, 1882, p. 11.

<sup>74</sup> W. Osborne Lilley, *Bound for Australia on Board the Orient* (London: Andrew Crombie, 1885), pp. 5 and 68.

<sup>75</sup> "Daily Life on a Cunardier," *The Irish Times*, December 28, 1897.

<sup>76</sup> T. S. Hudson, *A Scamper Through America: 15,000 Miles of Ocean and Continent in Sixty Days* (London: Griffith and Farran, 1882), p. 12.

<sup>77</sup> Walter Clutterbuck, *The Skipper in Arctic Seas* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1890), pp. 94-95.

<sup>78</sup> J. P. Hollingsworth, "Sail, Steam and Seaplanes, Part 1," *Up the Creeks with British India*. Reproduced online at

<http://www.merchantnavyofficers.com/sail.html>;

earlier published in *Sea Breezes*, August 1994.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Charles Dickens, *All the Year Round, A Weekly Journal*, vol 6, (London, 1862): p. 538.

<sup>81</sup> Lt. Arthur Havergal, "Music in the Royal Navy, An Appeal," *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, vol.17, no.1, (1890): p. 5.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>83</sup> G. Stewart Bowles, "Boats!," *Extracts from a Gun Room Ditty Box: Short Stories and Poems About the Royal Navy Circa 1898*: available online at [http://www.pbnyon.plus.com/A\\_Gun\\_Room\\_Ditty\\_Box/Boats.html](http://www.pbnyon.plus.com/A_Gun_Room_Ditty_Box/Boats.html)

<sup>84</sup> "The Channel Fleet: An Afternoon with the Crew of the 'Immortalite'," *The Irish Times*, September 24, 1890, p. 1.

<sup>85</sup> Admiral Lord Charles Beresford, *The Memoirs of Admiral Lord Charles Beresford, Written by Himself* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1914), pp. 366-367.

<sup>86</sup> "Charge of Stealing Nelson Relics," *The Irish Times*, July 11, 1904. A longer account was carried in *The Times* (London), September 17, 1904.

<sup>87</sup> "Tariff Tasks," *The Meath Chronicle*, April 7, 1923, p. 5.

<sup>88</sup> Chris Algar, Stephen Chambers, Robert Gaskins, David Lee, Randall C. Merris, Wes Williams, "Charles Jeffries, Concertina Maker," *The Concertina Library*, (2008), <http://www.concertina.com>.

<sup>89</sup> Notes by grandson Roger Blazer; see website at <http://www.maxalding.co.uk/hall/Blazer/blazerbiog.htm>

<sup>90</sup> Arnold Bennett, "From the Log of the Velsa, East Anglian Estuaries," *The Century Illustrated Magazine*, vol. 89, (1914-1915), p. 72.

<sup>91</sup> Christopher McKee, *Sober Men and True: Sailor Lives in the Royal Navy, 1900-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 134-135.

<sup>92</sup> "Christmas at Sea: The Way They Have It in the Navy," *The Times* (London), 1927.

<sup>93</sup> Posting by Margaret Sager (?) online at <http://www.battleships-cruisers.co.uk>.

<sup>94</sup> Len Stevenson, post of wartime memories, Dundee Central Library, online at [www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/stories/95/a7764195.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/stories/95/a7764195.shtml)

<sup>95</sup> Bartimeus (pseudonym), *A Tall Ship on Other Occasions* (London: Cassell and Company Ltd., 1915), Ch. VIII. Available online at [http://www.pbnyon.plus.com/A\\_Tall\\_Ship/Content2/etc.html](http://www.pbnyon.plus.com/A_Tall_Ship/Content2/etc.html)

<sup>96</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, (Dallas, Texas), March 13, 1898.

<sup>97</sup> "Rigorous Life on a Training Ship," *The State* (Carolina), July 14, 1902.

<sup>98</sup> "Jack Tar's Christmas Dinner," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, December 18, 1898.

<sup>99</sup> Stuart Frank, "Concertina Around Cape Horn," *Concertina and Squeezebox Magazine*, vol.11, no. 2, (1984): pp. 14-17. Stephen Chambers showed that the inscription "Moon, Plymouth" referred to the music shop Moon and Sons.

<sup>100</sup> Colin Dipper, personal communication to the author, 2007.

<sup>101</sup> James William Holmes, *Voyaging: Fifty Years on the Seven Seas in Sail* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co, 1972), pp. 123, 145-146. I am indebted to Robert Lloyd Webb for this reference.

<sup>102</sup> "Music on Shipboard," *The New York Times*, September 6, 1903.

<sup>103</sup> I am indebted to several members of the concertina.net Forum for this information, from a thread in January 2005 entitled *Concertinas and Sea Music*. I have not been able to independently verify the identity of the sailor with the concertina.

<sup>104</sup> John Williams, *So Ends This Day: An Autobiography* (Victoria, Australia: Globe Press, 1981), p. 53. I am indebted to Robert Lloyd Webb for this "sighting" and for a description of its background.

<sup>105</sup> An account of the last voyage of the *Garthpool* may be found at <http://www.stanhugill.com/>

<sup>106</sup> Stuart Frank, "Concertina Around Cape Horn," *Concertina and Squeezebox Magazine*, vol.11, no. 2, (1984): p. 11.

<sup>107</sup> Stan Hugill, *Shanties from the Seven Seas* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961 and 1984).

<sup>108</sup> John Townley, *The Instrument of the Sea, Concertina & Squeezebox*, vol. 1, no. 3, (1983): pp. 22-23.

<sup>109</sup> John Townley, personal communication to the author, 2008.

<sup>110</sup> "Musician or Beggar?", *The Times* (London), January 28, 1922.

<sup>111</sup> See thread of December 7, 2007 at <http://www.mudcat.org>, as well as Stuart Eydman, *Life and Times of the Concertina*, <http://www.concertina.com>.

<sup>112</sup> Al Brown, posting on <http://www.thession.org/discussions/display/6622>, May 16, 2005.

<sup>113</sup> Robert Lloyd Webb, personal communication to the author, 2007.

<sup>114</sup> Peter Nansen, *Love's Trilogy* (New York: J.W. Luce and Company, 1908).

<sup>115</sup> To demonstrate this, if one does a search of current Google digital books for the key period for concertinas, 1830-1930, and looks at the number of "hits" for *concertina* (923 in January 2008), then compares them with "hits" for *concertina and ship* (573), one sees that about 60 percent of entries are regarding ships in some way or other. Closer inspection will reveal a fair degree of irrelevant scrap in both categories, as described above, but even a scant cleanup reveals the underlying essence: people wrote more long prose (i.e., not newspaper advertisements and concert reviews) about concertinas at sea than on shore.

<sup>116</sup> Norman Fraser, "The Cult of the English Concertina: a Chat with Miss Christine Hawkes," *Cassell's Magazine*, (1908), pp. 159-161 or <http://www.concertina.com>.

<sup>117</sup> *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, September 23, 1877, p. 4.

<sup>118</sup> William Clark Russell, *Rose Island, The Strange Story of a Love Adventure at Sea* (Chicago and New York: Herbert Stone and Company, 1899), p. 161

<sup>119</sup> William Clark Russell, *A Strange Elopement* (New York and London: MacMillan and Co., 1892), pp. 57-58.

<sup>120</sup> William Makepeace Thackeray and others, "The Female Tars of Great Britain," *The Comic Almanac, An Ephemeris in Jest and Earnest* (London: John Camden Hotten, 1848), p. 233.

<sup>121</sup> John Masefield, *Sea Songs*, Temple Bar volumes 1 and 2, 1906, pp. 56-80.

<sup>122</sup> Cicely Fox Smith, "Sailor Town," *Sea Songs and Ballads* (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1919), pp. 11-12. An earlier edition of this book was published by Elkin Mathews, 1914.

<sup>123</sup> Stuart M. Frank, "Concertina Around Cape Horn," *Concertina and Squeezebox*, vol. II, no. 2, (Spring 1984): pp. 10-18.

<sup>124</sup> To read some of them, go to the Forum at <http://www.concertina.com>, and enter the words "concertina," "sea," and "sailor" into the search window.

<sup>125</sup> Vanessa Collingridge, *Making History*, BBC Radio4, May 29, 2007, Program 9.

<sup>126</sup> Herbert H. Booth, *Instructions for the Salvation Army Concertina* (London: Salvation Army Bookstores, 1888). Available for free download at <http://www.concertina.com/chambers/booth-salvation-army-concertina/booth-salvation-army-concertina-1888.pdf>

<sup>127</sup> Roger Digby, personal communication to the author, 2008.

<sup>128</sup> Rev. Arthur Lewis, "The Early Life of E. J. Peck," *The Life and Work of the Rev. E. J. Peck Among the Eskimos* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1904), p. 8.

<sup>129</sup> See discussion at the National Maritime Museum site, <http://www.nmm.ac.uk/server/show/ConWebDoc.1792> 8. I am indebted to the Wikipedia entry on the "Sailor's Hornpipe" for this and several other references to the hornpipe's use.

<sup>130</sup> Stuart M. Frank, "Concertina Around Cape Horn," *Concertina and Squeezebox*, p. 11.

<sup>131</sup> Hume Nesbitt, *A Colonial Tramp: Travels and Adventures in Australia and New Zealand* (London: Ward and Downey Ltd., 1896), pp. 200-201.

<sup>132</sup> William Henry Winslow, *Naval Lads and Lassies in War with Dixie* (Boston: C. M. Clark Publishing Co., 1911), p. 170. This book is an account of the author's wartime service on the USS Nautilus. He wrote another account in *Cruising and Blockading, A Naval Story of the Late War* (Pittsburgh: Weldin and Co., 1885).

<sup>133</sup> For example, see Paul de Grae, "Ryan's Mammoth Collection and the O'Neill Collections," published online (2005) at

<http://www.irishtune.info/public/ryan-oneill.htm>.

<sup>134</sup> Note: not the inventor of the sewing machine, who was a distant relative.

